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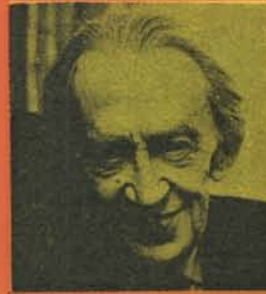
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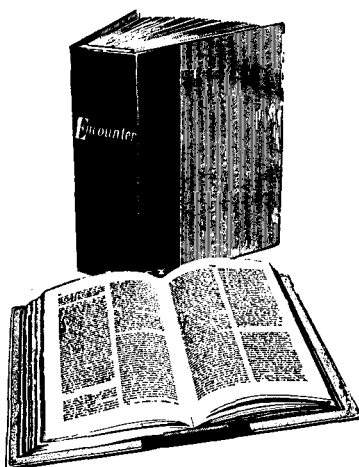
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E. J. Mishan

Futurism

And the Worse That Is Yet to Come

UNTIL THE CLOSE of World War II active speculation about the technological features of the future was restricted in the main to the literature of science fiction, regarded until then as an exhilarating avenue of escape from the humdrum of the all-too-solid present. Secure in the here-and-now, and undeterred by premonitions, the reader's imagination could soar freely through time and space. He might even smile at the incidental reassurance provided by some of the tales of such pioneers of the genre as Jules Verne and H. G. Wells, in which contemporary society continued to move soporifically along its customary grooves undeflected by the cataclysmic discoveries of some scientific maniac. And what could be cosier than a Wellsian time machine that, following a fearsome trip into the far future, could be depended upon to return the author to the present in good time for tea around the parlour fire?

It is this once-powerful sense of the here-and-now that has begun to recede since the War. Much that was only yesterday relegated airily to the realm of science fiction is now recognised as sober scientific fact. And there is virtually nothing in today's science fiction that is thought of as "impossible" tomorrow. The increasing pace of technological and social change in the post-war world is actively dissolving the familiar signposts of our civilisation before our media-soaked eyes. Willingly or reluctantly we are impelled to give more and more of our attention to the shape of things to come.

Just now we are obsessed with the pattern of life over the next ten, twenty, or thirty years. Private and government organisations

both in Europe and America have begun to busy themselves in this fantastic new field of futuristic research, interpreting the present, extrapolating the future, issuing bulletins of "prevision" from time to time—as yet manifestly uncertain whether their task is to mould the future or to make provision for it. The problems that are beginning to exercise us, however, are not those of science *per se* but the problems posed by the impact on society of the products and by-products of scientific and technological progress of which the so-called population explosion is one of the more topical instances.

A RECENT EXAMPLE of the growing concern with the more immediate future was a series of articles which appeared in the *London Times* (October 1969) each written by a well-known figure in the social or physical sciences. With the exception of Arthur Koestler's distinguished contribution, the over-all impression conveyed was one of qualified optimism. Admittedly there were some sticky issues we should have to grapple with. But one was not to worry. Man's powers, we were assured, are growing all the time and doubtless he will meet the challenge when he has to. A decorous concern was admissible, but there was no cause for alarm.

But perhaps there is just a little cause for alarm. For the scientist's vision of the future is apt to be biased by the conventional myth through which he rationalises his unending probings into the universe, a myth in which he sees himself as directing mankind toward a widening horizon of technological opportunities from which men may freely choose their style of life. Any serious scepticism about the

ultimate benefits to be conferred on humanity by the onward march of science tends, therefore, to be interpreted as an attack on scientific achievement in the past, or as an attack on the scientific method, or as a lapse into intellectual Ludditism.

Scepticism of this sort can in fact be perfectly rational. The efficacy of the scientific method may be readily conceded. Nor need one deny that a goodly number of scientific discoveries appear to have made the lot of mankind physically more comfortable. At the same time it is perfectly reasonable to debate the question whether a particular scientific development has been or is likely to be worthwhile. It is no less reasonable to pose the question whether future developments in any one, several, or all fields of scientific endeavour are likely on balance to make the bulk of humanity *more* contented or *less*.

These are not questions the scientist cares much to answer. They are large questions, elusive, in the last resort perhaps unanswerable. But they are surely the relevant questions and deserve widespread and prolonged debate. When confronted with them in fact, the scientist has a propensity to wander toward the inevitability thesis or the neutrality thesis, or both. As to the first, the essence of it is that man's irresistible curiosity, regarded as the supreme virtue of *homo sapiens*, enshrined today in vast temples of scientific research, can never be satisfied. *Ergo* scientific progress cannot be halted. The question of social benefit may be relevant, but in the light of an inevitable historic process it is of academic interest only. As to the second, the scientist cannot be held responsible for the outcome of his discoveries since science itself is neutral. It provides men with the means of power over the universe. But it is up to men themselves to make use of that power for good or evil.

THERE IS, OF COURSE, A SENSE in which science is neutral, and that is the trivial sense in which a gun is said to be neutral: it cannot harm anyone unless someone pulls the trigger. The accumulation over time of scienti-

fic and technological information does not activate itself. Men consciously make use of the new knowledge that is vouchsafed to them. And what happens to the world depends upon how they use it. So much is obvious, and tells neither for nor against science.

But there is a pertinent sense in which science cannot be neutral—even though every scientist were to pledge himself never to make a political statement. Given the condition of society as we know it, given the momenta arising from existing economic and political institutions, and given also the incidence among mankind of impatience, ignorance, ambition, folly, avarice, and corruption, some outcomes, some ranges of outcomes, of the possible fruits of any particular branch of scientific research, are more likely than others. If then something goes amiss, or some unexpected mischief is wrought, the scientist may admit to bad judgment: to having attached more weight to the chance of social gain than to the risk of hurt. In the last resort he may plead ignorance of the sort of world he lives in. But in a world where scientific knowledge is continually being put to use by imperfect beings in an imperfect society, the scientist cannot evade responsibility.

Turning to another familiar controversy, whether we can solve the problems bequeathed to us by widespread application of science—problems such as ecological destruction, burgeoning populations, atmospheric pollution, traffic-choked cities, oil-fouled beaches, exploding suburbs—without further application of science,¹ there is in this case a non-trivial sense in which the answer can be *yes*. By reducing the production and use of certain kinds of hardware, say the automobile and the aeroplane, we can certainly diminish atmospheric pollution, tourist blight, and traffic congestion. Since such a policy is technically quite feasible we may properly infer that we can solve some very pressing problems by using less technology, not more. Of course, it may be urged that this is not a particularly clever or commendable way of solving the problem. And it goes without saying that science and technology would favour further opportunities for research with the aim of discovering ways that will enable us to absorb yet more of these technological all-sorts while preserving us from their polluting spillovers.

Removing this strand of truth from the

¹ See for instance the recent correspondence in *ENCOUNTER* (December 1970) between Sir Peter Medawar and Professor Paul Ehrlich, also the comment by R (October 1970).

controversy, there remains the substantive and probably unanswerable issue about which is the better way of relieving humanity of any one of the currently unwanted products of applied science. For even if it could be ascertained in advance that science does have a contribution to make in solving some of the problems it has inadvertently brought into being, the relevant considerations in any decision to finance the required research are, first, *the time* over which humanity, hanging grimly on to its hardware, has to suffer before substantial relief is at hand, and secondly, *the degree of risk* incurred in any technological solution to a specific problem—and indeed in providing us with new technological opportunities also—of accidentally releasing upon our heads a plague of ecological or genetical eruptions hitherto unknown to us. In the world of 1971 the alternative of seeking improvements by using less technology has to be taken seriously.

THE EXPERIENCE ON WHICH a reliable assessment of humanity's prospects can be based is obviously too narrow, for it is only during the last century that science has begun to be applied on a universal scale. Perhaps the least controversial judgment would be to regard the widespread use of science as a mixed blessing, with possibly an edge of advantage if the choice ever came to all or nothing—at least for the condition in which the application of science has left the earth today. But such judgments are not of topical interest. What is of topical interest is the question whether the apparently unabating advance of science over, say, the next half century will improve the human condition or cause it to degenerate. Again, this is a large question and one which cannot be resolved on the basis of empirical knowledge, though it is one on which some light may be shed by informed conjecture. My own conjectures, I need hardly add, run counter to much of the prevailing complacency which is apparently founded on a faith that Man, being infinitely resourceful, will ultimately meet the Challenge of the Future.

The word "ultimately" is obviously equivocal, but even if we suppose that man will somehow perpetuate his race in the universe for all time—the ultimate triumph—I

find little consolation in the vision. For there is a vital distinction we are wont to overlook whenever we utter these heroic sentiments, one which, when established, will enable us properly to take the measure of what matters. The distinction is between *man* and *men*. It is man, seen as Prometheus unchained, who is the real hero of science, as indeed he is of Science Fiction. But man is an abstraction, an embodiment of the ingenuity of social institutions, the singular inheritor of the knowledge produced by an array of scientific disciplines manned by armies of specialists. Men, on the other hand, are but ordinary mortals; vain, foolish, weak and vulnerable. Measured against the sum of modern knowledge, each one of them is infinitely ignorant. Man is a paragon, an undivided intelligence, a god. Men are a multitude of creatures spread over the earth, for the most part living in daily struggle and frustration; their feet in the mud, their heads in the stars; beset with doubts and fears; worshipping, hating, loving and sorrowing; victims of endless turmoil within and without.

But, in all that matters, it is *men* that are the substance, and *man* that is the shadow.

THE GOOD SOCIETY for a mortal man is one which, somehow, manages to bring him into harmony with himself, and so with others. It is one that manages to establish an external order that does no violence to his internal order; a society evolved or devised, as to allow his instincts to range without malice to others or hurt to himself. In order to endure, it must not only cater to the aspirations of an élite, it must make ample provision for the needs of ordinary men and women. The features of the new era, however, one that began with the post-war affluence, impress me as being least likely to promote such a society. I would not for a moment deny the more obvious products of economic growth, which include a bewildering assortment of automobiles, television sets, vacuum cleaners, refrigerators, washing machines, electric tooth-brushes, electric back-scratchers, all advertised to make life more pleasant for us—and, in order to beguile the time, a growing range of plastic baubles and a profusion of inane gadgets that mock the power of hallucination to invent.

But, of course, we are not to ignore either some of the more salient features of our post-war civilisation that arise from the widespread use of these products of applied science—the irresistible spread of steel and concrete, or the growing plague of motorised traffic (on the ground and in the air) plus the accompanying din, stench, pollution. Notwithstanding the potential contribution toward their solution of further technological innovations, there appear each year fewer avenues of escape.

I might add, however, that such unprepossessing features are not privileged to enter the grand GNP computation, being entirely negative in value and obstinately resistant to quantification. For all that, their social consequences manage to gate-crash into the index; for a growing proportion of GNP is, in fact, everywhere being devoted to increased expenditures on law-enforcement in the attempt to curb the mounting delinquency, the sporadic violence, and the organised American-style crime—to say nothing of the vast expenditures on perverted forms of urban construction designed to keep the rising streams of traffic moving through our polluted cities.

Since life has become increasingly complex, frustrating, frantic, and wearing, any statement that, “on balance”, we are better off than we were, say, 20 years ago, is purely a declaration of faith.

SOME OTHER CONSEQUENCES of being born into an era graced by widespread application of science can bear a little emphasis. Whatever our occupation or our prospects, we all suffer from the accelerated erosion of the environment in a wider sense: i.e., from the increasing pace of obsolescence, and from a harrowing degree of specialisation that cuts us off from the largeness of nature and from the ease of intercourse with our fellow men. The scientist or academic, though his work subjects him to the most gruelling pace, believes he has some compensations—recognition of published work, intellectual communication with others in his field, occasional mention by the press. I believe that he, too, is under illusions that will not weather the future. But we shall let that pass, and turn instead to the greater part of humanity. For it is the ordinary men and women that are destined to become the victims of the future. There will be the

obvious economic problem of providing them with employment in a world where automation can reproduce any routine skill and where computers can undertake any routine calculation or other mental tasks. But if the bulk of what we today call the working force is to become unemployable, the problem will not simply be one of providing men with means of “organising their leisure.” This is the sort of “challenge” that is viewed with equanimity by scientists, since it is generally associated with research grants, and viewed with particular relish by social workers, who also are anxious to advance their uncertain and tenuous status. But they have entirely overlooked the far more important human problem; that of providing for the self-respect of the ordinary mortal. And, frankly, I see no way of providing for it in the indescribably complex technological civilisation we are about to enter.

AS THE ORDINARY MAN moves further into the age of automation, and perforce is freed from mental and muscular efforts, all the syrupy sounds of the television ads, all the gadgetry and paraphernalia of soft living, all the tranquillisers and euphetic drugs in creation, will not suffice to conceal from him the nakedness of his predicament. Social workers may teach him to play games for his health, and suggest recreations to soothe his thwarted instincts. But as an ordinary human being he will have nothing really to offer society. He may be regaled with goods and privileges. But nobody needs him. He will live by the grace of the Scientific Establishment, earmarked as a drone, protected for a while longer by social institutions and the remnants of a moral tradition; yet transparently expendable, like some ten thousand million others, heaped like ants over the earth.

One way of circumventing this ignoble destiny was envisaged, though more as satire than idea, by the late Aldous Huxley: a *Brave New World* in which specific types of humans were raised in test tubes to fill the occupations they were later to follow. There were, “happily”, no sex-tabus, and any vestigial anxieties were invariably calmed by a euphoric tablet, *Soma*. Indeed, since man and social environment had been so designed to fit perfectly, Huxley’s *Brave New World* might well be regarded as the Nemesis of

today's fashionable and fuzzy-minded "progressive," with his touching faith in salvation by science, his impatience to explore the limits of physical pleasure, and his outraged rejection of the notion of sin, or of the value of human suffering. For in this beautifully adjusted civilisation, presided over by a complacent and benevolent dictator, the concepts of good and evil were indeed obsolete. There was neither vice nor virtue, morality nor immorality. The behaviour of a man was to be judged by reference to only two categories, health and sickness—these being clearly related to efficiency and inefficiency.

And what are the consequences for humanity of having achieved so perfect a state? Imagine a potential Romeo, in this Brave New World, stumbling for the first time across a potential Juliet. The first flicker of incipient desire would be extinguished by instant fornication. And if, for some perverse reason, Romeo vacillated, Juliet could be counted on to console herself at once with a couple of *Soma* tablets. In a world without frustrations in a world of instant gratification, there can be no sublimation and, therefore, there can be no romantic love. In such a world, there can be no conflict, and therefore there can be no drama. There can be no passion, and therefore no poetry. There can be no suffering, and therefore no tragedy. And there can be no self-sacrifice, and therefore no heroism. The irony of it all is that only in Huxley's comically colourless and unheroic society have the dreams of countless reformers been realised, and the long search to free men from the frictions and frustrations of this world been brought to a successful conclusion.

As a parable, I find the story is well worth pondering on. But as a portent of things to come, it is not to be taken too seriously. Not because it is technically unfeasible—but simply because it runs counter to the dynamic of modern science. Brave New World, though perfectly conceived, is essentially a static society, stranded in time, bereft of aspiration.

IN CONTRAST, the prevailing Establishment has become fascinated with the idea of change: of perpetual change; of change as a norm of society; of change as an end in itself. And this Establishment is all the time transforming itself. If it is thought of, at present, simply as a conglomerate of dominant groups in

government, business, and the professions, the situation must also be seen as one of interregnum. For the prevailing Establishment is well on the way to becoming a Scientific Establishment.

The growing investment in higher education and the increasing numbers of young people today passing through the universities do not alter this fateful prospect. First, the overwhelming proportion of students are not specialising in the physical sciences. The bulk of today's students are to be found in the humanities, in the social sciences, or to be training for the professions. Secondly, in view of the size of the student population—currently running to eight millions in the United States—it is not surprising to remark that standards of accomplishment are on the decline, save perhaps for a handful of universities. More *does*, after all, tend to mean worse. Since the War, the bachelor's degree has been virtually worthless. Today, even the Ph.D. has lost its power to evoke respect in the community, and can no longer be depended upon to launch the successful candidate toward the upper echelons in government or business. If present trends in mass education continue, there is every likelihood of millions of dissatisfied ex-students milling about American cities, their frail expertise unwanted (how many sociologists can the nation employ?), unable or unwilling to fit into the uninspiring niches provided by industry and government, and inevitably forming a sort of intellectual *lumpenproletariat* that will go far to aggravate the general unrest, dissent, and desperation.

TURN NOW to those graduating in the physical sciences (where the prospects are brighter). In view of the rapidity of advance of modern knowledge, one observes that most of them are thankful to have mastered some of the basic theorems and techniques—well enough, at least, to enable them to engage in routine research. Few, very few, are capable of making original and substantial contributions to the subject. High up in the pecking order, increasingly recognised by industry and governments, as well as by their peers, are a few thousand of the elect. These few, the paladins, do get around. They know one another personally or through their publications. They form a grand international fratern-

ity, and one increasingly impatient of the constraints of national states, increasingly contemptuous of administrators and of the manoeuvres of big business.

Thus, the question of whether power can safely be vested in an élite of any sort, or whether, after all, it had better be entrusted to the common man—a question also raised in Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*—may, though it seems to be of perennial interest, soon be of academic interest only. The fact is that power—political power—is gravitating surely, and not so slowly either, toward the scientists and technocrats, the high priests of the new ecumenical faith.

The implications of this transformation are radical in the extreme. We are prone to think of scientific research simply as an adjunct of government and industry. Indeed, we have yet among us the traditional socialists committed by doctrine to think in terms of a propensity of private enterprise to subvert the potential of science for its own nefarious ends. But, over the last two decades, the prestige of science, its hold over the popular imagination, and its influence over the young, has grown irresistibly. A few more decades at most, and industry will be the adjunct, and government the agent, of Science. Economic activity will become subservient to the purposes of global scientific and technological research: the reverse of the relationship we are accustomed to think of.

AS THIS STATE OF AFFAIRS is realised, and unquestioning deference is paid to the principle of scientific research for its own sake, the question will inevitably arise: what is the Scientific Establishment to do about the masses of ordinary human beings?

Even if, by some miracle, the world population is stabilised at four or five billion souls, an all-powerful scientific establishment clearly has no need of some thousand millions of now useless mortals moving about the globe and cluttering up the limited space of the planet-laboratory. The prospect of diverting resources to provide them indefinitely with goodies and to ply them with entertainment and medicines will not be attractive. The temptation to be rid of them will grow stronger. Moral objections may no longer prevail: and political expediency can hardly

act as a check once power has shifted irrevocably to the controllers of the Scientific Establishment. Of course, the means may not be cruel. Water supplies, for instance, could easily be doctored so as to make human reproduction physically impossible—at least without special medical intervention. Within a couple of generations, only the chosen few—a select group of a few thousand beings, part-men, part-computers—will be left to inherit the planet earth. The story of mankind will have drawn to a close. And the era of pure science will have begun.

True, the earth may not survive that long. We may yet be engulfed in the Malthusian nightmare. As a result of some scientific mischief, or miscalculation, we may all go up in smoke. If we do not perish in a nuclear or biological holocaust, we may be the victims of some ecological disaster, and if, physically, we remain intact, the psychological strains and stresses of living in an automated society, with human activities increasingly programmed and regulated, may prove to be greater than the bulk of humanity can bear. The outbreaks of violence and hysteria we have begun to feel uneasy about (since they are manifestly unrelated to poverty or deprivation) may grow to such proportions as to break through the thin skin of civilisation. We may find ourselves, once more, in Sodom and Gomorrah—frantic and frustrated; with gloated eyes, and shrunken gullets. None of these possibilities is unlikely. But if, perchance, we survive this gauntlet of hazards, the destiny that awaits us, the ultimate triumph of science, will be one that ends forever the human drama.

IS ONE STILL permitted to end an essay on a pessimistic note? Perhaps an epilogue is called for. Let me then say this: the reins of power, though slackly held, are still in the hands of the people. The options are still open. True, men are the products of history. But not the passive products, else history would never change. And, if we believe in free will (and I do), it is at least as true that history is the product of men's choices.

There is, then, nothing in the physical state of the universe to prevent men making the transition from an economic system that, in the West at least, appears to depend for its survival on its capacity to mesmerise already

wealthy populations² to continue to ransack the world's limited resources on an unprecedented and growing scale while spreading their wastes indiscriminately as to foul their commonly shared environment; nothing to prevent their making the transition to a saner dispensation, one adopting as its priorities quiet skies, clean air, pure water, traffic-free towns, smaller populations, an easing of tempo, an extension of space, an enlarging of life, and the cultivation of an attitude of loving care to our tiny and unique planet. This latter option is technically quite feasible. Strange though it must sound on modern ears, and notwithstanding the banality of endless government exhortation to material ends, society can survive comfortably, indeed more comfortably, by moving off the exponential growth path. If men so willed it they could—incredible though it may seem—call a halt to the broad advance of technology and constrain its impetus to a limited number of humane projects directly connected with the relief of suffering.

The standard "respectable" defence of indiscriminate economic growth employed from about 1850 onwards is that it provides the wherewithal to relieve the poor and heal the sick and do good works generally. The continued popularity of this defence resides, paradoxically, in the fact that the ailing and needy appear ever to remain with us. For economic growth of itself is not a force making for greater equality any more than it is a force making for greater contentment. If a nation such as the United States, with an average family income today of some \$15,000, a nation consuming more near-rubbish per capita and disposing of more garbage per capita than any other nation, does not perceptibly improve the economic state of its indigent citizens it is simply a consequence of its overt political priorities—priorities that

are themselves fashioned by the growth ideology that powers the existing system.

And talking of the reckless rate of consumption of natural resources required to keep the system from floundering, one can say more. In whatever ways its aggregate income were to be divided among the population, the system would still be geared to persuading people to absorb more GNP-stuff each year than the year before. The cities would still be clogged with traffic, homes would be still strewn with unnecessary gewgaws and industrial gadgetry. It is naïve to pretend that economic growth is a deliberate policy directed toward worthy ends. It is simply an institutional compulsion.

But we should have to give up our toys! A hundred thousand academics would have to abandon their hopes of status and recognition. A million executives and bureaucrats would have to watch their little empires dwindle. Research laboratories would go to rust. Stackfuls of learned journals would cease to appear. The ambitions of technocrats would be thwarted. And what of the multitude, fretted with discontent, impatient to enter the city of the future, and made gullible by promises of new excitements, of miracle drugs, perennial youth, and undiluted pleasures? How are they to be disabused, and their fevered spirits calmed?

So, pushing on in imagination, we perceive the crux of the problem, arising as it does from the fact that we have lived too long in a civilisation dominated by avarice, eulogised as "ambition." Greed pulses through our psyche as naturally as blood through our veins. Whether it is the public man for office, the private man for money, the scientist for status, or the hippie for pleasure, our greed is unbridled, and we push on ruthlessly in quest of gratification. An element in man's nature has become swollen out of all proportion; and there is no harmony within him. How then can wisdom prevail in the counsels of men?

Try as I might, then, it appears that I am destined to end on a pessimistic note after all. To the effect, in sum, that in their despair, or greed, or both, men have come to place their faith in research, what they reverently call "*scientific research*". For deliverance they turn from Mammon to Science. And, when the time comes, Science, in its turn, will consign them to oblivion.

² I need hardly remind the reader that at this juncture I choose to step down from the economist's platform; in particular, I feel no longer bound within this context to accept people's wants, as revealed by the Market or Opinion Polls, as the ultimate data in the design of the good society. Though I shall not attempt to do so here, this departure from orthodoxy can be justified by reference to the powerful influence on people's wants resulting from restricted choices and restricted experiences under existing institutions. (The interested reader will find sceptical passages about free choice and consumers' sovereignty in chapters 12 and 13 of my book, *Growth: The Price We Pay*, Staples Press).

Nudism

I WENT BACK to the torrent I had seen for the first time last winter. Now the weather was hot and, not surprisingly, the idea came into my head to strip off my clothes and go naked. Nothing but the trees and the birds could see me. The torrent gushed out from a cleft in the hillside and then flowed down between high banks. Everyone with a body at all knows what a good thing it is to expose it to the sky. Even the roots protruding from the high banks were bare.

I bathed in the pool where, fully extended, I could just touch bottom. The water was warm from its contact with the land and smelt of earth. Over and over again I plunged in, then threw myself down on the grass to let the sun burn me all over, while bright drops like sweat trickled over my skin. Above my head, between the tree tops I could see the sky, looking like another empty pool. I stayed there until evening.

FOR SEVERAL DAYS NOW, I've spent every afternoon naked in the sunshine, walking about on the grass or the edge of the pool. Sometimes, though very rarely indeed, when I throw myself dripping wet on the grass, I lose all consciousness of my body. This is nothing like the feeling of resentment and frustration I used to have, as a little boy, when I was made to undress and have a bath. Now I pull off my clothes in a mad rush, eager to find myself again and reappear, with a wildly beating heart. I was conscious, too, of a certain uneasiness lest something might happen to shatter my solitude, which means I should have to act as if I were prepared to be seen.

I'm not talking about people in general. On my way to the torrent I walked past fields where men and a few girls were busy with the harvest, but it was unthinkable that one of them might come upon me in this hollow in the ground, ringed around as it is by bushes and steep banks. I could hear the slightest movement of a quail or a lizard and so should always be warned in time to cover myself. My disquiet stemmed from a different cause and I found it not entirely devoid of pleasure. My state of complete nudity staggered and amazed me every time it happened, as if it were something of great importance I had achieved here unthinkingly. Every time I stretched out, remembering to cover the nape of my neck, I knew the sun had its eye on me, searching out every part of my body from head to foot. What difference is there between me and a stone, a tree trunk or a speckled caterpillar, unless it is precisely the mental disturbance I feel when considering the point. Now water and the sun have dealt with me to their liking and have thrown a veil over me. Even in this I seem to understand that Nature will not tolerate human nudity and will do everything in its power to absorb the body as it does the dead. Sometimes I fancy I ought to stay in this place day and night. Instead, I go there every day and take off all my clothes, resisting the impulse yet at the same time exposing myself to the gaze of Nature with as much pleasure as I can. Close by the pool is a hollow where the grass grows high, always marshy, always in the shade. I go there sometimes to look around. The grass grows up to my middle, my feet are in the mud, but coolness is not what I'm after. I go in there to hide and

come out at some unexpected moment even more naked than I was when I went in.

THE SHRILL SOUND OF BIRDSONG above my head tells me they are paying no attention whatever to me. Everything is going on as if I were not there at all. Looking upwards from the bottom of this hollow I see passing clouds and the way the tree-tops are rustling as if there were an abyss between them and myself. The wind doesn't reach me, down here. As soon as I have thrown myself down I forget town and country places. My horizon has shrunk to the narrow limitations of the pool. Idly, but with amazement, I watch a butterfly or a tree trunk, as I feel with my body the pulsation of the earth on which I lie. At intervals the shadow of a cloud passes over me and then the air is cooler. Plants that are almost invisible in bright sunshine show up plainly like a tiny forest. They see their reflections in the water, their colours softened, yet distinguishable at a glance. Then I stand up and shake myself. I am as bare as a tree trunk underneath its bark, cool and fresh as the air around me. I see the sky behind the trees is bare, too, bare and at peace.

The shadows increase and I look at the wood or the still water, but I cannot express what I see and think. The key words are "grass" and "roots", "stones", "mud", the splendour of it all—no other word will do—but my body will not accept it. Enter into the grass, into a stone, my body would say, but that is not enough. This hollow in the ground has a nameless magic. To realise that this is so one must walk about in it, feel it, touch it. I have to make a real effort not to clutch at the roots and clamber up higher into the wood, between the thorny bushes and the green trunks, and walk about there. Instead, I content myself with discovering all I can about my own body.

IF ANYONE WERE TO COME ALONG when I've only just thrown myself down, dripping wet, I don't think I should bother to move. I'm as lazy as a block of wood. Water and sun, working together, are making me less and less active. They imagine they can cancel me out in that way, cover me up, but they don't know that instead they're

making me more and more like an animal. They harden my body so that it is capable of acting for itself. When I get here, covered all over with sweat, I am seized with the crazy idea of plastering myself all over with mud. I scoop it up in handfuls and rub it all over me. Then I lie in the sun till the mud has dried. (This, too, is a way of covering myself.) In this way, when I've washed it all off, I seem to come out of the water more naked than ever.

Whenever the pool is almost stagnant and the water covered with slime, I'm satisfied to stretch out and reach clearer water, so that I come out clean. Somewhere below the surface there is a spring. The water from it is bitter and cold. I try to find it, rolling on my back in the mud or crouching like a toad under the big roots that overhang the water. The slime quickly becomes mud and a whole afternoon is not long enough for it to become clear again. One might say the sun concentrates his most ardent beams on this hollow. It looks like the sky does in a heat wave. Now the water, being opaque, can no longer reflect anything. As I get out I still feel sweaty, with drops of water streaming down from my chest to my thighs.

After such bathes as this, the smell of swamp and mud is stronger. The hollow lies baking in the sunshine. There are rustlings, flutterings, a splash or two, and the song of birds. They seem to come from heaven knows where, but cannot be more than three paces away from me. It is at such a moment I forget I am naked. I close my eyes, and everything, the countryside, fruits, the steep banks, even a passer-by, should there be one, all from then on reveal their own personality, their existence and living space beyond the trees. Everything has its own scent, its savour, its individuality. All this comes and goes inside my mind as I lie baking in the sun. Why should I move if someone were to come?

But nobody does come. Boredom does, though, indeed it does. I absorb the sunshine, the water; I wander about a bit and sit down on the grass, look around me and sniff. I go back to the water, but nothing ever happens. Little by little the shadow of a tree lengthens until it covers the place where I lie. A different freshness starts to fill the

hollow, the stench of mud and of death increases. Now I can smell it as I smell my own body, which seems larger and more naked. Nobody comes, but why can't I go away?

The first time that whimsical thought occurred to me I felt terrified but I soon laughed myself out of that. Now, to rid myself of the taste and smell, I run up the path I came down to reach the pool, and stop between the low bushes where the grass is level. No longer am I conscious of any barrier between myself and the countryside. Beyond the trees I can see the plain where the cornfields lie. I throw myself down on the grass, lying on my back to face the sky in the last rays of the setting sun. I fear no contact, not even with the stubble.

THE HARVEST IS FINISHED NOW and the fields are deserted. No matter which way I go, I never meet anyone. The pool is waiting for me and I mourn for the days gone by. The risk was well worth taking.

My mind turns to the people who bathe in the river Po, especially to the women who imagine they are nude when they have taken off their clothes and put on others. Up and down they walk over cement or sand, making signals to one another, glancing behind and chattering as offensively as if they were in a drawing room. Then they expose themselves to the sun, some of them slipping down the straps from their shoulders to gain another handsbreadth of sunburn. They all undress and look around for their friends, but not one of them will put into words what they all have in mind—that their bodies are very different from those of other people. They have the courage to congregate in groups but haven't what it takes to do what they would all like to have done.

During the past few days I've enjoyed strolling through the fields under the eyes of men and women reapers and their oxen. Good folk who don't concern themselves with where I'm going. At any moment one of them could come to my torrent to wash or to quench a thirst and discover among the briars my body, burnt nearly black. Such people as these, if they think of going for a bathe, strip off their clothes without a moment's hesitation. Perhaps,

though, they do not bathe unless they did so when they were boys. I walked close to the sheaves of corn and noticed the ears were dark brown, exactly matching my body. I watched the reapers stretch out their brown hands, and bend their backs, their red kerchiefs fluttering. All the uncovered parts of their bodies are the colour of tobacco. Their shirts and trousers are as earthy as the bark of a tree trunk. People like these have no need to go naked. They're naked already. As I walk among them the clothes I am wearing on my back seem to weigh me down. I feel as festive as an ox decked up for a parade. I wish they could know that underneath I'm as black as they are.

IT'S HAPPENED! One woman at least knows my secret. I had gone into the water to wash off the earth clinging to me. I was floating on my back with my arms outstretched, looking up at the clear sky; thinking of nothing at all. I straightened up, slipping about on the muddy bottom and I bent over to swill myself off when a woman walked across my hollow. She was tall, a married woman with a bundle of leafy boughs at her hip. She came towards me, not in the least surprised or concerned. She saw me bending forward, my hands in the water, then she turned away towards the ravine, still carrying her bundle. I heard her paddle through the water of a spring, then she disappeared among the bushes. Her feet were bare. I saw her strong back reappear in the sunshine between the bushes and I heard her gathering more branches further in.

She had come down the path I used when I ran up to throw myself down on the grass. She must have seen me from up there, yet she calmly continued on her way, not even giving a backward glance when she had passed by.

Standing upright in the water, naked, I listened to the sound of her footsteps dying away in the distance. I was certainly more shocked than she was. Drops of water were running down from my skin. I went out to dry myself and I still couldn't believe it had really happened. How was it that I hadn't heard her coming? A woman's steps are different from a man's, but I

wasn't thinking of that just then. I was thinking of the way she had looked at me, without a blush or any curiosity, as if it was a natural thing to happen. If she had paused, or spoken to me with a smile, that would have been very different. I should have covered myself and perhaps even touched her. In either case I should not have been so agitated. Yet she was young, for in this part of the world, wives lose their beauty early.

THE CHILL OF EVENING was falling and I felt even more naked. My thoughts turned to that woman's eyes. She was sunburned, too. Was she tanned all over? Certainly she had no need to be. That isn't what matters. What is really important for her is to be healthy and to produce fine strong children. She gets as much sunshine as she wants while walking about in the open air. The same sun ripens the fields and the fruit, for here everyone drinks wine. Grapes darken colour, even when covered by leaves. The important thing to realise is that underneath there is a corporal entity.

She wore a dark coloured skirt around her strong legs and she walked heedless of stones or trailing roots. I can still see her striding purposefully into the wood to gather branches from the acacia trees that grow in such profusion there. They overhang the steep sides of the ravine and thrust out their roots. To me it seems they are peering down into the underworld and up to the sky. This is a hidden part of the wood, appealing to the senses with its dark shadows, its gloomy depths. By now the woman must be far away from here. Before me I see a bare ledge of veined stone that tells me the wood has its own individuality as the whole countryside has, covered with earth that in its turn is covered with growing things, naked and true to itself, as we all are. I touch my skin that still retains the warmth of the sun and I feel glad the woman saw me.

On my way home I pause for a chat at the cross roads where there is nearly always someone with something to say. Yesterday I saw Marchino and told him where I'd been. "I should go bathing there, too," he remarked. He's a sad-looking man with two-fingers length of beard and hard eyes, but

courteous enough not to ask if he could come with me.

He told me that tomorrow he was planning to go swimming at a place he knew where a mill stream broadens out to form a lake and there is always running water. "If you'd like to come?..." he suggested. I raised the difficult point that I don't wear bathing trunks. "You know best" he replied. "With me there's no need to."

That same evening we went to the place he had told me of, where the channel broadens out into a lake with banks of gravel and willow branches beaten down by the sun. At this time of day the boys are all in the fields. We took off our clothes and put them down in a patch of shade, then entered the water. It was silvery and caressing, though full of sand. Marchino swam with powerful strokes, while I stayed where I was, floating and looking up at the sky. In those few moments I was still thinking of the countryside, the tree-tops and the life that goes on up there.

When we came out of the water I had a better chance to look at Marchino. He must have been half naked while working at the harvest this season, for the only pale skin he had was on his stomach and thighs. He was hairy, covered with fine blond hairs bleached by the dog-days of summer. He was perfectly calm as he walked up the bank and threw himself down on the sand at full length. I turned my gaze away from him.

Between one subject of conversation and another we went back to the water to cool our heads. Marchino left it to me to talk of this and that, and he would reply at his own convenience after a while. Sometimes he spoke when I was already thinking of something else. I was pleased by the knotted muscles of his chest that didn't move, not even when he took a deep breath.

He remarked that I must have spent a lot of time sunbathing to be so dark, almost black. "I didn't get it while working," I replied, "I'd rather be you than me, getting it that way. It's important to be tanned all over. Otherwise what a figure of fun you'd look on some special occasion!" We were talking idly, resting our necks on little cushions of sand. After a while he agreed with me and saw the funny side of it. He

thought for another minute or two, and went on: "When they reach that point it's not our sunburn they're thinking of."

In my mind's eye I was watching the woman as she came through the wood. The thought struck me that Marchino would have been an ideal match for her. I felt inclined to tell him so, but how could I? Marchino would not have understood. It's typical of him not to think of things like that.

APPROACHING MY HOLLOW, I came between the trees above the ravine in the warm dusk, treading the path the woman had taken, walking cautiously. Any country place is far from being simple. Just think how many people must have come this way to create such a path. Every bank of the stream, every spot in the wood, must have seen something. Every place has a name of its own.

Through gaps in the leaves, like little windows I look up to the sky. Below it stands the hill and the level ground, both with their carpet of fields. Their gentle sweetness bears a hint of work and sweat, an atmosphere that enfolds the whole wood and the uncultivated corners it contains, betraying their nakedness. It is here, in such wooded places, often marked by a thicket or a special stone, the land lies naked and unconcealed.

I pause a moment on the fringe of the trees. This is where cultivation begins and

the hard work it entails. A few clumps of acacia and alder, hanging above the cleft where the torrent begins, give the scene a wild, uncultivated air. I cannot go further in, since I am naked. This time I understand why, to undress, one must go down to the little clearing beside the stream; also why country folk wear clothes when they go into the fields to work and to clothe the land.

This is why the woman looked at me so calmly. She knew I was hidden, a luxury in itself. To see my body was much the same as seeing her own. She didn't know I was thinking of going out to the fields. Everything in the country has a name, but there is no name for a gesture like that. And neither she nor Marchino gave it a thought.

By this time the sun was setting, even here. I hear the grass waving about, making a rustling sound. Birds fly past; a deeper murmur lulls earth and sky. The land seems bare, but is not. Everywhere mists are rising, covering and sheltering the smell of sweat. I wonder whether there is, in the whole world, a ditch, a coastline, a little patch of earth not yet dug up and reshaped by hands. Everything bears the stamp of human observation, human language. It comes from the fields like a gentle breath, but does not reach my hollow, where water, liquid mud and the smell of sweat stagnate all together and have nothing to say to me. Yet every day I find life there, but then I lie fully extended and almost black, like a dead man.

Blind Girl

Her hand, pitched by the bus's motion,
fell in his lap, and stayed,
moved in his lap, to the bus's rhythm,
while her face
stared ahead,
beautiful behind dark glasses.

If the whole earth
was going slowly blind. If the whole earth
tapped through the firmament
on white sticks, white forests of birches.

D. M. Thomas

Malcolm Bradbury

Writers Today

Who They Are—How They Live (II)

IN ENGLISH SOCIETY, as in most Western societies, the most familiar idea of the writer is of the writer as a free agent, enabled to sustain his literary activity over a lifetime—either from the income he makes from selling his writing, or from some form of patronage. In this society, most writers in our century have tended to begin writing early, and to regard their work as a dedication or a career. Their usual hope has been to continue with that work as little disturbed by other obligations as possible. And although quite a lot of our writing is in fact produced by people who write only incidentally or occasionally, we still tend to see as the ideal type the writer who is full-time, dedicated and spectacularly individual.

Not in all societies is this economically possible. But England over the last two centuries has sustained a large number of writers who have been able to make writing their sole career and the basis of their life-style. Not all of these have been supported directly by the market; a good number, both in the last and the present century, have been sustained by their own independent incomes. There has in fact been no steady correlation between literary quality and financial success; writing has long been a notably insecure and risky career in which not only the under-qualified fell by the wayside; and the “indirect” financing of inherited income has much to do with our literature.

On the other hand, the pattern has also given a number of very important writers a great financial success. And with the success has usually gone great public prestige; in the last century and the early part of this, the activities and personalities of writers became matters of great public fascination. Part of this interest was of a sort now more familiarly accorded to film stars or pop stars; but part of it was an interest in the representative importance of this or that writer’s personality and way of life as a social symbol—a way of distilling and recreating the essential experience of all of us. The places writers have lived, the images and myths they have created, the way their lives have developed, all become impor-

tant parts of the meaning we attach to our society and our own experience in it. For, after all, the independent literary career is a supreme form of the free and uncircumscribed life in our society. So, in short, our literature depends not only on people writing but on their finding the right sort of terms and conditions for the adequate living of a creatively stimulating life; and that is one of the values and functions we attach to our important writers.

THE LITERARY LIFE IN OUR SOCIETY is alluring, both to writers and readers, both as fact and fantasy, for several reasons: for the exemplary freedom it seems to offer, the possibilities for rapid social advancement it allows, and the changes of prestige, culturally or financially, that it can bring. And a literary life requires not only the talent to write, but also the possibilities of nurturing that talent and the dedication to pursue it.

Of course writers have seen their aims, functions, motives and potential influence in very different ways. For some writers, the continuous process of literary self-exploration has been the most important fact about their task; for others, the most important thing has been the desire to communicate awareness, understanding, perceptions with other people; for yet other writers, the element of risk, adventure, and opportunity has played an im-

portant part. Angus Wilson, in *The Wild Garden* (1963), describes how a nervous crisis "forced me to rearrange my experience of life in imaginative terms, to try to make sense by making fictional patterns." The pressures that made him first a writer were largely those of his internal emotions and needs. Other writers have been much more aware of a specifically moral or even didactic purpose, and seen their role as an heroic one (D. H. Lawrence, for example). And H. G. Wells, in some comments made in a preface to a series of Russian translations of his works, emphasises another set of feelings which his writings enact:

The literary life is one of the modern forms of adventure. Success with a book—even such a commercially modest success as mine has been—means in the English-speaking world not merely a moderate financial independence but the utmost freedom of movement and intercourse. One is lifted out of one's narrow circumstances into familiar and unrestrained intercourse with a great variety of people. One sees the world. . . . One finds oneself no longer reading books and papers, but hearing and touching at first hand the big discussions that sway men, the initiatives that shape human affairs. . . . The days in the shop and servants' hall, the straitened struggle of my early manhood, have stored me with vivid memories that illuminate and help me to appreciate all the wider vistas of my later social experiences. I have friends and intimates now at almost every social level from that of a peer to that of a pauper, and I find my sympathies and curiosities stretching out like a thin spiders web from top to bottom of the social tangle.¹

But most writers are best seen as mixing such motives, as conducting an internal and a social exploration at the same time. A psychological, sociological, or economic account of them is therefore too limiting. And in our tradition it has usually been assumed that the good artist will acquire a public value and role, that he stands a chance of finding an audience in the public at large. And that means an income, derived from doing that.

The writer will gradually acquire, if he has the skills and the merits, an expanding reputation; and if he happens to appeal powerfully to some aspect of the general taste or to discover an awareness and sensitivity that has public meaning he can well become both prestigious and rich. So for most writers the desirable state of success will come when the art which satisfies oneself also satisfies suffi-

cient other people to make the literary life self-financing. The income from books reassures the writer that he has a meaning and also that he can have the financial freedom and independence in which to write yet more books. In brief, the literary life here normally lies somewhere between personal self-extension and social action, between a mission and a career. We sometimes assume that success in the market is destructive of literary excellence, and often this is true. (Sometimes it indicates the absence of such excellence.) Many writers have feared success for that reason. But many others have grown through their success and the resulting independence. There is in fact no single version of the worthwhile literary life in our time.

BUT IT DOES EXIST WITHIN a particular pattern of opportunities and possibilities; it is a stylised form of social communication. For instance, the literary career in England normally involves a fairly gradual process of acceptance. A writer will produce his work and then submit it to a publisher or publishers, who are the usual first court of appeal. He may already have made some reputation before this, often through periodical publication, or else among other writers who have seen his work in manuscript. If the publisher decides to accept his work, he may very well do so with no expectation that it will sell profitably. Indeed he may be prepared to make a loss, in order to nurture an author he expects to be successful later, or simply as part of his "prestige" list. (The situation here is somewhat different in the theatre, where until recently the work that was not commercially promising had few outlets.)

Some writers will remain "prestige" writers for the rest of their writing days, making little or no profit for their publisher and themselves from work which might, nonetheless, have critical success. Others may achieve considerable success and income—suddenly, with a best seller, or slowly, by a gradual process of winning a name and an audience. This is the literary process as it operates through the commercial publisher. But in this century we have seen a considerable growth in the number of small presses, many of them short-lived, which have enabled writers to be published outside the normal commercial market. Normally, however, a writer who first pub-

¹ Quoted by Gordon N. Ray, "H. G. Wells Tries to Be a Novelist", in *Edwardians and Late Victorians* (1960).

lishes with a small press will move to the commercial market in due course. In short, our "form of social communication" is normally a version of the commercial process, mitigated by the willingness of some publishers to print deserving authors at a loss and by a fringe of non-commercial ventures which encourage talent outside the familiar channels.

TO BEGIN WITH, at least, the writer normally requires a source of income which will support him in his early writing days; that, perhaps, is one reason why so many writers come from social backgrounds where independent means are a possibility. He may have a small private income, as a fair proportion of the modern writers listed in the *Concise Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature* in fact had. He may extend the value of this by going to live in another country where the living is cheap and the rate of exchange favourable; that is one reason why many writers are brief or long-term expatriates.

On the other hand, he may take a job which allows him time for writing, and it will usually be some kind of professional job. At one time the church was the familiar sponsor of literary activity; in the modern period, that pattern has more or less completely disappeared. Richard Altick, in his survey, notes the change in the pattern of these associated professions; in the nineteenth century the church, the arts and the government were the three main sources of literary sponsorship, while in the twentieth century the two main other professions are professional, salaried journalism or teaching in schools or universities. He also notes the increase in those who did make their living from writing, though as he observes this body includes many whose source of income is considerably from free-lance journalism. And, we might add for the later periods, from film or television writing, which, at least until very latterly, were usually regarded among writers as forms of hack-work.²

In certain cases, it is apparent that a serious literary interest has developed late among those who entered these professions and

saw them as their sole professions. But in many other cases—and it is, as I have said, very notable that most writers, in the modern period at least, began to write early and presumably sustained the hope of finally living by it—the other profession has been in part a form of assistance. At any rate, it has normally been assumed that in order to write one needed the guarantee of a small income—Virginia Woolf's £500 a year and a room of one's own—and the social system has normally been flexible enough to allow this.

In the 20th-century heyday of literary journalism, which comes in the 1920s, many writers were able to sustain themselves by writing literary journalism for magazines like *The Athenaeum* or *The London Mercury*. In recent years, with the decline of such journalism, the impact of steady inflation, and the increasing professionalisation of all the professions, including teaching in universities, finding a sustaining and attractive atmosphere that produces an income and allows one time to write has been harder. (Often writing becomes very much the *secondary* activity.) And this has undoubtedly a good deal to do with the fact that nowadays many writers go into professional writing jobs—in television, journalism, or advertising—early on and tend to stay there. By selling the same skills they hope to use independently, they tend to become, in fact, much less independent agents. And in the long run this increasing professionalisation of the writer himself may be one of the most significant developments affecting the freedom and liberalism of literature.

THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR COMMERCIAL SUCCESS from literature have, in many respects, grown greater in the last hundred years. With the expanding machinery of communications, and the extending audience for them, many more people are making profit from literary skill than ever before. Despite the fact that many of these are simply serving the market, the possibility of balancing literary merit and financial opportunity has grown—certainly earlier in the century, though there has been an increase of difficulty in recent years when there has been a recession of interest in imaginative literature. These expanding opportunities became particularly clear at the end of the last century, and a number of important writers, like Wells, Shaw, and Arnold Bennett, seized on them.

² Today the careers of writers like David Mercer and Dennis Potter represent a marked change in this pattern, and suggest that it has become possible for writers to find that media like television and films are culturally flexible enough to offer whole new sets of exciting possibilities for artistic exploration.

Often these were writers of fairly poor social background whose interests were almost necessarily at once serious *and* commercial. They were writers with new opinions and attitudes to express, and they aspired to lead taste and reform opinion without wanting to violate entirely their relationship with a potential audience. They assumed that the new difficulties of art in a more mercantile age and the presence of the new audiences represented a challenge that could be met and explored to the long-term good of art and the influence of the artist. So, indeed, the literary life could become, as Wells said, "one of the modern forms of adventure."

Since then, many very good writers, like Graham Greene, Evelyn Waugh and Iris Murdoch, have succeeded in maintaining a fair balance between merit and success in the market. Others have not: Virginia Woolf earned only £228 from her first three novels, and by the age of 47 was earning only £520 a year from her books (she had, of course, independent means). In a high proportion of the cases in fiction and drama, though not in poetry, the important writers listed in the *Concise Cambridge Bibliography* did succeed in making literature their full profession; they managed to live by writing from early middle age onward. For many writers of serious bent the pattern of risking early poverty or spending income as a gamble on the future has worked well. It has usually depended on the writer's being willing to undertake many different kinds of writing, often of a journalistic kind, in order to support more dedicated activity. But, at least as regards writers earlier in the century, once critical success has come and a reputation has been won, there has been a commensurate financial success, allowing the writer to produce his later work in independence or even considerable comfort.

Of course such successes conceal a large class of the failed, but the failure has commonly been both critical as well as financial. The essential risks are high, and they may nowadays be higher than they were. For instance, a recent survey of 1,587 members of the Society of Authors, a relatively select

group of restricted entry, showed that only a sixth of these earned more than £1,050 a year from writing. A third made less than £312 a year; and *another* third made less than £78 a year.³ Certainly the difficulties of independent free-lancing have increased, as the market for literary journalism has declined and as, at the same time, the public has turned away somewhat from imaginative literature. The high rewards of men like Arnold Bennett or Bernard Shaw, who mediated seriousness and popularity, have not totally disappeared (as we can see in the cases of John Osborne or Kingsley Amis). But their life-style has. As Richard Findlater says:

In 1938 a young aspiring writer without dependants, without influence and with only his talent for capital, could get by on £4 a week. This was enough for a furnished bed-sitter in central London, for keeping in touch with films and plays, and for a weekly meal out in Soho; and it could be earned with relative ease on the fringe of the literary world so that he had time for his own writing. By 1952, however, a young man living in that way would have needed at least £9 a week; while by 1962 the minimum was £12 a week, for a Spartan existence without much to spare for playgoing (or smoking). In tax alone, he would have to pay twice as big a share of his earnings as in 1938 . . .⁴

NOT SURPRISINGLY, THEN, the literary scene in this century has always contained a large neo-bohemian contingent, normally consisting of two types of writer—those who, in the interests of protecting their art, have made a deliberate choice of semi-poverty; and those who, by not succeeding, have been forced into it. All have in their different ways explored the economics of uncertainty. The writer of this kind may do occasional casual work, or, post-war, live on National Assistance; or be supported by a husband or wife. He may, in recent years, get a creative writing fellowship in a university, often in the U.S.A., or a grant from the Arts Council. He may, as was notably possible in the early part of the century, live in cheap country cottages, perhaps even borrowing these from friends.

He may, again particularly early in the century, live in bohemia itself, a cheap-rent urban area with a cosmopolitan flavour and a group of other writers around. Soho and Bloomsbury, Montmartre or Montparnasse, were the possibilities most available to the English writer. The pattern usually involved a cheap room, an approach to patrons, and the

³ Richard Findlater, *The Book Writers; Who Are They?* (1966).

⁴ Richard Findlater, *What are Writers Worth?* (1963).

undertaking of small literary tasks from which money could be earned. It may—as is the case often with the present semi-bohemian Underground—or it may not depend on a policy of deliberately exploiting society. Many of those in bohemia were short-term members, who moved on in due course to a commercial success; others were more permanent, either through necessity or choice. Most bohemian environments tend to begin as cheap-living communities and then to acquire a general attraction and draw in many followers, who then drive up the rents. In this case the bohemian group may re-form elsewhere, or it may become a more expensive type of *avant garde*.

The capacity of bohemia to attract many writers who are not financially ill-placed should not, indeed, be forgotten, since it also functions as a place for making reputations. It normally works through little magazines, small presses, and clique reputations, and as such it is one of the forming grounds for writers who are not necessarily financially forced to be there. Many, indeed, are those on private incomes, seeking a context of other writers, moving into the city. Bohemia has been importantly associated with the early careers and first reputations of a significant number of English writers, and in certain important periods—particularly between 1908 and 1914, when many of the new reputations were made through the little magazines—it has produced a large number of the new writers. On the other hand, its real production is often much smaller than the impression it creates. It is often a stylisation of the writer's life among groups containing only a small number of serious or practising writers. Its presses and periodicals are often very short-lived and financially shaky. It contains large numbers of literary aspirants who quickly withdraw from their ambitions. Indeed, much of our important literature comes from quite other environments. And most of it has come from writers producing relatively independently of one another and publishing through established channels.

THE WRITER'S LIFE IN ENGLAND seems to lie typically somewhere between the semi-commercial and the semi-bohemian modes. But it has tended, until latterly, to be a fairly independent form of life, once the commitment to

a literary career has been taken. We have not had, like the United States in the 1920s, large numbers of writers deliberately exiling themselves in another country, though quite a number of our writers have, for various reasons, often economic, lived abroad. But many others have not, and indeed have played an important part in our social, educational and political affairs. And, in different ways, they have manifested a serious and committed responsibility to literature, and spoken in the culture on behalf of culture. However, it may be that, in the growing atmosphere of literary professionalism, and the increase in the literary salariat produced by television, this will be less possible and likely, especially as pressure grows upon the independence not only of the writer but of the written work, the book itself.

HOW DO OUR WRITERS EARN? We have seen that the writer's life has a tendency to be financially precarious but also to be potentially profitable. How does this, in fact, work out in terms of life-patterns for our writers? It is, of course, well known that the literary profession is financially uncertain and full of financial inequalities: so Sir Walter Scott built Abbotsford from his novels, and could earn £5,000 for one of them, while Jane Austen earned no more than £700 from hers in her lifetime.

But, at the end of the nineteenth century, the writer became increasingly exposed to the market, and the financial opportunities of literature became much more arbitrary. Books became much cheaper at this time and a part of the retail trade, a situation which tended to accentuate the discrepancy between merit and income. At the same time the market for them became much larger, and it consumed a great deal of writing. Most of what it consumed was ephemeral, work normally written specifically to satisfy its assumed immediate needs. Journalism of the book was encouraged, as well as all the other forms of journalism, which were expanding rapidly to satisfy the outlets created by the rise of the popular press, magazine and book. All this tended to produce a surplus of writers, and what George Gissing called the "New Grub Street" became more significant than ever in literary life. Remarkable rewards were possible, but the overall market was a depressed one, especially for those who had

serious ambitions and little private money to support them. Publishers and editors were able to buy the work of writers of whatever quality for remarkably little, and by the late years of the century it was undoubtedly true that, as Arnold Bennett pointed out, the prevailing publishing system worked against the writer's earning much from literature unless he had "strong mercantile interests." The gap between what Findlater has called "authorship by activity" and "authorship by income" could and did grow wider. Even the author who hoped to find and please a market felt himself to be in difficulties, while for the more serious author the outlets for more good poetry and fiction were also decreasing. It is certainly the case that the change in the literary climate over these years is partly due to the growing sense of literary difficulty.

As we have seen, one of the effects of this was to encourage writers to organise to protect their interests, and the foundation of the Society of Authors and the official literary agencies date from this period. It is not hard to see why. With many seeking the prestige of publication, and with the expansion of the numbers of the literary profession and the intelligentsia, books could become cheap fare. Many books appeared at the expense of the author. Thomas Hardy published his first novel, *Desperate Remedies* (1871), at a cost to himself of £75. In his book *Methods of Publishing* (1891), Samuel Squire Sprigge pointed out that three-quarters of all novels were published on terms requiring authors' payments. In these cases, the author usually received royalties (though these were often dishonestly computed, resulting in low profits even on a successful book). Otherwise, publishers adopted the system of requiring an author to make an outright sale to them of his work (a familiar 19th-century pattern which was open to increasing abuse), relinquishing his copyright entirely so that no royalties could be earned from success. George Gissing, for instance, received an outright sum of £150 for his *New Grub Street* (1891)—a novel about the difficulties of writers. Earlier in the century, such practices had helped serious writers; now, with the expansion of the profession and the cheapening of the book, they simply encouraged literary poverty. Even writers who were cushioned financially found a gap between what they wanted to write and the taste of the

publisher and the public. At the same time, the environment of publishing expansion was also one in which large profits were possible with success. Arnold Bennett, for instance, was reporting his earnings in 1913 as over £300 per week, from a diversified output in journalism and fiction, and from a consistently high rate of production (he records in his journal at the end of 1910, for instance, that he had written 355,900 words in the year).

AS A RESULT, many of the writers of the period evince many of the attitudes of a new commercialism, even if they also protest against certain features of it. The sense of a gap between what one wanted to write and what one had to write was strong.

This is the theme of Gissing's *New Grub Street*, and the book embodies all the uncertainties of direction and conviction the situation could produce. The hero, Edward Reardon, refuses to supply the "good, coarse, marketable stuff for the world's vulgar" that the situation invites, despite the pressure of his wife, who claims that "Art must be practised as a trade, at all events in our time. This is the age of trade." Around him are a gallery of opportunist writers, exploiting expanding literacy and the taste for superficial reading matter, professionals responding to the demands of the market, and a general decline of cultural values. But Reardon's problem, amid the financial worries he suffers, is defining his seriousness, his sense of separateness from the crowds that surround him.

One of the persistent issues of conscience and integrity in the period was, in fact, the interest in a new realism. If one of the literary tendencies of the period was towards a new and neo-scientific realism of viewpoint, it was partly the result, perhaps, of the broader social origins of writers and their exposure to a broader social experience, partly the result of the way neo-science was penetrating intellectual thought and partly the result of the growing secularisation of writers. Writers like Gissing, Hardy and Wells were all engaged in battling not only against financial difficulty but the pressure of demand, from publishers and lending libraries in particular, for a more edifying literature. Hardy's experiences with his last novel, *Jude the Obscure* (1894), "completely cure [d] me of further interest in novel-writing," and he turned to poetry entirely. For

writers even more positively committed to the idea of the perfection of the art, like Henry James, the difficulties were the greater. James's later income from writing was very low indeed, and his friend Edith Wharton even diverted some of her royalties into his to conceal the smallness of his audience. But it is less financial worry, or a feeling of not being permitted expression, than a deep sense of the loneliness of the serious artist that haunts his writing (as in, for instance, "The Lesson of the Master"). He has no true audience, no effective criticism or understanding of his work to support and justify him. Hence his sense of the need to "give up" everything in the interests of art; hence his profound sense of cultural loss.

HOWEVER, IT IS IN FACT the writers who were most exposed to the market who offer the fullest exploration of it; and these are normally the writers who come from poorer backgrounds and so are not financially cushioned from its implications. Frequently their story—the story of those who try to live by writing or to support it on a small private income—is one of a long struggle with poverty, sometimes later mitigated, and sometimes not.

Gissing, for instance, has left us fairly clear records of his financial transactions, on which he depended, since he was committed to a professional literary career.⁵ He spent all his life on the edge of poverty—in part, certainly, because of his unwillingness to meet the demands of the market. He invested £125 of his own in his first novel, *Workers in the Dawn* (1880), on an agreement which gave him two-thirds of the profits, and earned him £2. Later he turned to selling his novels outright: *Demos: A Story of English Socialism* (1886), brought him £100 and, a little later, working under pressure and producing a novel a year, he earned £150 outright for each. He felt his position to be contradictory, as it was; for instance, he joined the Society of Authors (and

was disappointed to find it a gathering of tradesmen) and in 1891 turned to a literary agent, A. P. Watt. This didn't raise his income, but he later turned to dealing, more profitably, with another major agent of the day, J. B. Pinker.

Arnold Bennett was vastly more successful, partly because—as we can see from his *The Truth About an Author*—he was able to reconcile his strong mercantile concerns ("I am a writer, just as I might be a hotel-keeper, a solicitor, a doctor, a grocer, or an earthenware manufacturer") with the equally strong desire to be a great artist. He was throughout his life a professional journalist, drawing a high income from that source, and he skilfully used the services of J. B. Pinker until by about 1926 he was earning some £20,000 a year. It was Pinker's way to support his writers in the early days of their career in the hope of recouping his loans later; this he did with Stephen Crane, Joseph Conrad and D. H. Lawrence. In Bennett's case his early assistance was clearly a success. By this process, clearly recognised on both sides as an investment, an effective modern form of patronage emerged. At least in this case; not all of Pinker's authors were to prove so profitable.⁶

THE PROBLEMS OF ADOPTING the motivations of art to a climate of extreme mercantilism had many subtle consequences and produced many different views of the artist. One inevitable consequence was that the writer, particularly the novelist, tended to see himself in the same verbal and perceptual world as the journalist. This, too, is one of the stimuli of realism. The very difficulties of defining the authorial role became greatly increased; and the swashbuckling, reformist journalist with his standards of truth and integrity and his curiosity about the way systems and institutions worked, about the poor and about social conditions generally, encouraged a new kind of social involvement and even a distrust of the arcaneness of art as such.

Hence the famous disagreement between H. G. Wells and Henry James about the relative claims of art and life. Certainly writers like Wells and Bennett found that the intermittent satisfaction of the claims of seriousness and those of trade provided an alluring form of the

⁵ These are excellently recorded in Jacob Korg, *George Gissing: A Critical Biography* (Seattle, 1963).

⁶ See James Hepburn's edition of *The Letters of Arnold Bennett: I. Letters to J. B. Pinker* (1966). Also the letters of D. H. Lawrence and Stephen Crane, which make it apparent that Pinker was often rather more a disinterested patron than perhaps my comments suggest. In Crane's case, it seems impossible to avoid the view that Crane regarded Pinker as precisely a financial support.

literary life. Wells, like Bennett, was proud to assert that he was both an artist *and* a journalist, and the attack in *Boon* on the overwrought consciousness of James was part of a general conviction about the best way of serving the prevailing literary scene. In his early reviewing, Wells made it clear that he considered the literary scene to be debased, and very much by people who had similar education and background to his own. "The coming to reading age in 1886-1888 of multitudes of boys and girls . . . changed the conditions of journalism and literature in much the same way as the French Revolution changed the conditions of political thought and action," he said, referring to the consequences of the Education Act of 1870 which established the Board schools. One consequence was the popularity of works

whose connection with art is purely accidental. It is scarcely too much to say that every writer of our time who can be called popular owes three-quarters of his or her fame to the girls who have been taught in Board Schools.⁷

And his career is clearly one in which he accepted that situation as an opportunity while, at the same time feeling the profoundest reservations about it.

Like Wells, Bernard Shaw equally resolved to use the prevailing situation to exercise his maximum influence consonant with the winning of a large audience. He too began writing fiction, and in his first nine years in London earned only £6 from writing; his *Collected Letters* show how strongly he protested about the prevailing financial environment of fiction. In 1881 he rejected an offer to publish *Immaturity* if he would pay £95 with: "If I am to be a capitalist as well as artist, might I not as well publish on commission and retain my copyright entire?"

"I object to publishers," he also wrote, "the one service they have done me is to teach me to do without them. They combine commercial rascality with artistic touchiness and pettishness, without being either good business-

men or fine judges of literature."⁸ But after a wealthy marriage in 1898, which freed him from a heavy burden of reviewing, he turned away from fiction to the theatre, where he could both appeal to and affront the middle-brow standards more easily and, it proved, with vastly greater profit. In 1914 he had enormous success with *Pygmalion*, and by 1931 he was earning £16,000 in the United States alone. He left a six-figure fortune.

WRITERS LIKE BENNETT, WELLS AND SHAW, who were so successful commercially, represent the spectacular successes, and behind them lay as many spectacular failures, sad instances of poverty and insecurity. All were sufficiently radical writers to extend and develop the prevailing artistic conventions and possibilities; but they were at least fortunate in that the forms in which they wrote—the novel and the play—were still effective media of social communication, and they had no modernist desire to exhaust them.

But in the course of the century their success has become less and less repeatable, as the profits of the single book go down and down in an expanding but commercially competitive market. And, of course, many of the most interesting literary forms have tended, partly because of the complexity of artists, partly because of the decline of serious audiences, to become minority forms.

This has been particularly true of poetry, which in this century has become less and less popular. By the turn of the century the days when a Tennyson could sell 60,000 copies of the first edition of *Enoch Arden*, earn £500 for a single poem and £20,000 for an American lecture-tour, were obviously over. This was partly because poetry was ceasing, as Professor V. de S. Pinto has put it, to "represent the equilibrium of a society that had achieved some degree of integration" and was becoming increasingly a matter of private artistic sensibility.⁹ It was also, partly, because some of its functions were being yielded up to the novel in a more realistic and secularistic age; it was partly because poetry—in some ways the most "literary" of all literary procedures, marked by methods of distillation and compression of linguistic effect, having behind it a powerful tradition of self-consciousness and a view of the poet as the exploratory artistic hero—particularly tends to

⁷ Raymond Williams (in *The Long Revolution*) resists the view that the 1870 Act "opened the floodgates of literacy." But the significance of the Act was perhaps symbolic; it suggested to publishers, editors and writers a large change in the market and increased their efforts to reach it.

⁸ George Bernard Shaw, *Collected Letters: 1874-1897* (ed. Laurence, 1965), pp. 543-4.

⁹ V. de Sola Pinto, *Crisis in English Poetry: 1880-1940* (1951).

be the focus of a sense of artistic difficulty. The 1890s markedly dramatised poetic poverty and assumed the minor audience.

Nine-tenths of my time, [wrote John Davidson] and that which is more precious, have been wasted in the endeavour to earn a livelihood. In a world of my own making I should have been writing only what should have been written.

And although the situation in poetry had not reached its present state, where a volume of new poetry appears (despite the improvement wrought by the paperback) to be almost necessarily a non-commercial proposition, and where scarcely any poet makes anything like an income from poetry alone, it became markedly insecure. Poets like Kipling, Masfield and Hardy all profited considerably from verse, and collections of poetry were still potentially a source of some profit for publishers, and there was an audience which could be captured even for poetry of a markedly novel kind.¹⁰

But as Ezra Pound (in this as in so many things a remarkable cultural explorer of the era) stressed, the poet had to find new ways of support. He himself worked hard to hunt out new ways of financing the poets around him in London, getting them jobs on magazines, accosting potential patrons, and starting a fund to get T. S. Eliot out of the bank where he worked to let him live by writing (in fact he became a publisher for his support). Patronage came back again, either indirectly, through the founding of magazines which paid poets, or directly, through outright payments. It was part of the economics of bohemia, part of financing the novel writer until his broader-based reputation had time to emerge.

WE CAN SEE the neo-bohemian pattern at work in the case of many of the poets and the self-conscious novelists of the period.

¹⁰ On this see C. K. Stead, *The New Poetic* (1964) and Joy Grant, *Harold Monro and the Poetry Bookshop* (1967).

¹¹ Figures here from J. W. Saunders, *The Profession of English Letters* (1964).

¹² For a more extended discussion of the importance of American economics in modern English writing, see the article by Bryan Wilson and myself, "Why Young Writers Emigrate: The Away Game," *Twentieth Century*, Vol. 169 (January 1961), pp. 69-80. There is a fictional treatment in my novel *Stepping Westward* (1965); and in Thomas Hinde's *High* (1968).

James Joyce, who came of a background of reduced circumstances and like his hero, Stephen Dedalus, left Dublin to fulfil literary ambitions in Paris, lived there on less than a pound a week. After that he earned £80 a year teaching at the Berlitz Institute in Zürich. Having made nothing from his first volume, *Chamber Music* (1907), but an *avant garde* reputation, reinforced by the publication of *Dubliners* (1914), he began, largely through the efforts of Ezra Pound, to acquire patrons and supporters. During the war he was assisted by, among others, Harriet Shaw Weaver, who also helped Eliot and Pound and supported the magazine *The Egoist*. But the patronage also extended to assistance in the publication of his books—in *The Egoist* and the American *Little Review*. Another patron, Sylvia Beach, who ran the expatriate bookshop called Shakespeare and Company in Paris, published *Ulysses* for him. Despite obscenity difficulties both in England and the States, it began to produce a considerable income. But Joyce, like D. H. Lawrence, did not live long enough to acquire the real rewards his writing was to bring; Lawrence at his death in 1930 had £4,000, but the sale of the Penguin paperback *Lady Chatterley's Lover* alone (and it was one of a number of different hardback and paperback editions) has totalled over three and a half million.¹¹

Here, we might say then, are two writers who were not bound by the market. The rewards of their work came, but the pattern failed to provide the income that sponsors the writer when he is most in need of it. By the fortunes of patronage, and in Joyce's case through doing other work, both of these two writers were able to live as writers. With the decline of the cultivated rich in England, this form of personal patronage has tended to disappear; and various writers more latterly have sought to find institutional equivalents for it. Some writers have sought to be put on a salary basis by their publishers. Others have drawn on Arts Council bursaries. Latterly, too, patronage from universities, particularly American ones, has been important. Indeed, the post-war equivalent to the expatriation of Joyce and Lawrence, which had among other things the advantages of cheaper living costs, has tended to be the voyage to the United States, or even the sale of manuscripts and work-sheets to American libraries.¹²

A notable instance here is Dylan Thomas, a good deal of whose income derived in different ways from American sources, and who in his middle age found himself heavily dependent on American lecture-tours.¹³ Otherwise, literary economics in England have grown in the last twenty years even tighter than before. The independent novelist or poet is a much rarer figure. And the two most important and flamboyant life-styles of writers in the earlier part of the century—that of the commercially successful man-of-letters; and that of the literary bohemian—have tended to give way to a phase in which literature is produced by what is, in effect, a literary salariat.

LARGE REWARDS FROM WRITING are possible today. Findlater has pointed out in a recent article that rich authors are getting richer, and poor authors getting poorer. For the writer in tune with the market, its possibilities are greater than ever.

There are various remarkably successful multi-media figures, like Jacqueline Susann, whose work is patterned to the conditions of modern success in a market effectively geared to large-scale production. As a result they are serialised, paperbacked, sold on a global overseas market, made into films and even television serials. Such writers may even become incorporated companies (Agatha Christie Ltd., Ian Fleming Ltd.). But at the level of medium success, where most of the better literature fits, conditions are a good deal more marginal, as the print-order needed for a successful book rises and the number of purchasers falls. In some ways, says Findlater, the prospects for the serious independent writer of high reputation but low income, a staple type in the market, have improved lately:

¹³ See, for a fuller account, John Malcolm Brinnin, *Dylan Thomas in America* (1956).

¹⁴ Richard Findlater, "The Writer Considered as Wage-Earner," *Times Literary Supplement* (Money in Writing issue No. 1), July 24, 1969. He concludes: "If anything is clear, it is that there is going to be an increasingly painful process of adjustment between British authors on the one hand, and, on the other, the further extensions of the education system, of state investments in the arts, of printing technology, and of the concentration of ownership in the publishing industry. It is the author who will have to do most of the adjusting: meanwhile, the wage rate—unlike the casualty rate—remains low . . ."

¹⁵ David Holbrook, "An Author's Apprenticeship," *Guardian*, March 28, 1963.

With the advent of the Arts Council grants and such sizable new prizes as those awarded by Bookers and W. H. Smith, writers like V. S. Naipaul have a better hope of augmenting their relatively meagre return from their books with bonuses which will not only buy them writing time but, for a period, may boost their advances and even their sales.¹⁴

They also have the chance of gaining writer-ships-in-residence in universities, selling their manuscripts, or appearing on television. In other ways, because of a shift away from imaginative literature, and the general reduction of outlets for it—a declining number of serious literary reviews, a reduction in the book-pages of newspapers and weekend reviews, a threatened decline of serious broadcasting in the BBC—the prospects grow worse.

The practical consequences for a competent, busy and serious writer were laid out in some detail a few years ago by David Holbrook, who reported that after completing nine books (in eleven volumes) he was beginning to feel secure as an author. His career, divided between teaching and writing, but with about 25 hours a week spent on writing, showed almost no writing profits for the first nine years for which he charts it, and did not rise above about £600 a year for another three.

Only now, 14 years after I started, can I contemplate becoming a full-time professional writer . . . My choice . . . is between living on royalties at about £1,500 a year plus part-time journalistic earnings, or to take an educational post, earning, say, £2,225—and paying tax at the full rate on my £1,500 royalties, the product of so many years when my earnings were below a factory worker's wages.¹⁵

This brings David Holbrook into what Findlater has called the "lucky sixth" of professional writers today.

HOWEVER, THE WRITING OF BOOKS, particularly imaginative books, is less likely than ever to attract those who enter the profession to live by writing. Not all are interested in it in this light. Writing still has something of the character of a cottage industry, and its roots strike down into many local writers' circles, many part-time writers who write as a spare-time activity, and, of course, many married women writing at home. Many writers have also tried to break out of the professional pattern by pursuing new forms of publishing structure, from the cyclostyled circulation of books to the development of writers' cooperatives, often

in conscious rejection of the idea of the word as a commodity. Some live on welfare, and it is true that there are in the modern industrial state various economic lacunae in which activities like writing can be exercised. However, writing is even more than ever linked to a large expansion of the media, written, aural and visual, most of it produced on a large and costly scale. One consequence of the situation is that writers have shifted increasingly towards media other than books.¹⁶

THE REAL BENEFITS OF WRITING TODAY tend to go to those writing for film and television. For instance, the Television and Screenwriters' Guild (another feature of the highly professional organisation of writing today) has more than 500 full-time writers among its members, 11% of whom earn over £80 a week, and more than 40% of whom earn more than £20 a week, from their writing. A writer can often earn more from writing an hour-long television play (perhaps £500) than he can from writing a novel; and he can write the television play very much more quickly. The writing of books is likely, in fact, to attract only those who feel some urgency about writing individualistically and seriously. In these days, when not only patronage is hard to come by but private income is rarer and savings themselves in an inflationary situation hardly support any career, the independent writer is something of a threatened figure; and the career is to some extent a declining career—despite the evidence of a high rate of publication in fiction and poetry.

Even the appeal to literary values is itself harder to make, in a democratising and, increasingly, a highly politicised age. The pre-war writer still tended to think of himself in terms of four literary categories: the Novel,

Poetry, Drama, and Journalism. Now there are many more, making demands on writers, but offering them a different kind of role. The technocrat writer, visibly emerging in the 1920s and 1930s—reported in fiction by Evelyn Waugh in England, and Scott Fitzgerald and others in the U.S.A.¹⁷—is now a familiar type. The situation of the writer in film, radio, or television is one that demands a high level of skill in the manipulation of technical equipment. This means, to a fair degree, that experiment within the media is determined (more so than in most modes of writing) by developments taking place outside the actual writing situation—by technological advances made by engineers, and applied by a team of persons of whom the writer is only one. In the characteristic hierarchy of such media (which are complex institutions in their own right) the writer is, of course, usually in a team-situation, and in effect an employee. As such, he is not necessarily highly regarded and is subservient to direction. He may assert commitments to "literature" but these will not be taken at all seriously. He is there for his skills, not because of his integrity.

IN THIS SITUATION, the contemporary writer can be thought of as both more and less professional than his predecessors. More so, because he has considerable technical mastery, is often highly trained, and is increasingly "unionised" and supported by a well-developed system of agents and contracts for his protection. In all these ways he grows closer to the model of the other professions and his circumstances become bureaucratic ones. But in the traditional sense he is obviously less professional—less committed to literature as culture, as a mode of individualism, as the expression of his own art and his own literary aims (which in today's situation become very hard to define). Most of our full-time writers now must relate in some way or other to this large world of the media or the services. Though many writers start on the bohemian model, it remains rare as a long-term prospect.¹⁸ Today it is not difficult for writers to make the transition from the *avant-garde* world to that of the technological writer; they can even appear to have much in common. The changing patterns of reward

¹⁶ The literary agent Michael Sissons has said: "The authors of most of the first novels for which we have been responsible in 1967 are now involved either in a film treatment, or a television play, in which they are working out themes which would previously have been presented as short stories."

¹⁷ See, for instance, F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Pat Hobby Stories* (1967).

¹⁸ "Novelist Brian S. Johnson last week signed an £800-a-year contract with Secker and Warburg to write two novels in three years, putting him in the exceptional class of being a salaried novelist. . . . He thinks it is appropriate that an experimental writer should have an experimental contract." *Observer*, June 6, 1965.

make writing for the technical media the most attractive and secure of contemporary careers in writing, but there are other attractions. The media offer direct confrontation with an audience; and they are novel and changing enough to permit experimental relationships with it to exist, to permit the exercise of daring ideas and new techniques. Because of this high degree of immediate contact and the relative neutrality of the content, which ranges freely from traditional to advanced, even writers not seeking success find television or film tempting. Technology itself becomes, moreover, an obsessive instrumentality.

The inevitable effect of all this is to make writers concerned much more with the "radical" means and techniques of distribution than with the "purity" of their work. These media are by their nature very much less "perpetual" than the book. The time of the period of exposure is very much more limited; the technical media tend to create for the moment, and to work on a principle of very high artistic wastage. But of course this situation tends to reduce a writer's feeling of commitment to the long-term impact of his work, his sense of writing for posterity. It even reduces, generally across the literary scene, the distinctiveness and individuality of writers; and in a time when many are writing it becomes very hard for a writer to acquire a distinct individual reputation, to stand out from the general group. So everything encourages the writer to move away from an "aesthetic" approach to his work, and towards a much more directly professional one.

A further significant factor is the disappearance of the significance of the printed book as an object, and of the private reading situation as the basic point of contact between writer and reader. So the writer has tended

to turn from the more permanent written word to the more ephemeral spoken word, from the considered to the impromptu, from the work written for long-term use to work written for the occasion.

The changes that have taken place lately in the composition of the reading public, away from the old stratifications of "high", "middle" and "low" towards an undifferentiated centre; the relative decline of "imaginative" writing in relation to other forms of writing; the disappearance of the financial conditions encouraging literary bohemianism; the fading of a clearly defined notion of "high" culture; and perhaps, above all, the removal of literature from the context of literacy to a context with a different technology and different relations between creators, transmitters and receivers—all are crucial factors in a situation in which the writer's role and self-image are again visibly changing.

ONE MIGHT PUT THE POINT in a rather different way. We live in a culture which is strongly oriented towards achievement, and our view of literature is one that emphasises its nature as a public thing, requires an objective assessment of it. In more placid societies the emphasis can be on the creation rather than consumption of art. There are new sects in Japan, with millions of followers, which see art as part of man's religious sense, not something made for consumption by others. So the followers will go out and look at (and occasionally draw) a tree, studying it for hours together. We tend to regard art in a much more instrumental way, and this can well be turned readily into an economic formulation; it is the act of creating for others, finally for a market which can be emphasised, even among bohemian writers. It becomes part of Marx's "fetishism of commodities."

So, even for the bohemian writer, art becomes a livelihood, an instrument as well as a dedication, subject to the assessment of the critical if not the mercantile market. And, as more and more our place and worth in society come to depend upon instrumental skills, on what one does rather than what one is, then so has writing tended to become more instrumental, less concerned with communicating perceptions of truth than with finding more functional and immediate ways of existence. This situation is intensified rather than reduced in our kind of "mass" society, when the private intuitions, impulses and motives involved in creativity are less and less prized for their own sake, and the writer's relationship with his audience tends to become much more formalised, more remote, more competitive with other writers, more business-like.



Column

THE TIMES LITERARY SUPPLEMENT seems to have dropped its proposal that the West should apologise to the Soviet Union for the award of the Nobel Prize to Alex-

ander Solzhenitsyn. Nor does it seem to have taken any steps to implement my suggestion (in January's *ENCOUNTER*) that, in the absence of anyone else, it should take upon itself the task of apologising to the appropriate Soviet authorities.

Nevertheless, it continues to maintain its view that Solzhenitsyn's position "has become, or should have become a reason for embarrassment in some Western countries, including this one" and in a later Commentary (1 January 1971) has given an expanded version of it. It now abandons its earlier insinuation that Solzhenitsyn may have been less than frank in denying that his novels had reached the West with his knowledge or consent; in that case, however, the *T.L.S.* finds it an additional reason for embarrassment that his novels should have been published here at all. Further, on the hypothesis that some of the manuscripts were sold in the West in order to discredit their author, the *T.L.S.* proceeds to build a very peculiar argument. If this were so, says the *T.L.S.* ("If it is true, as it may very well be true . . . If this was the case, then. . .") the KGB's scheme would have required, to achieve its object, the cooperation of "Western media, in which Solzhenitsyn might be adopted as a political rather than a literary talisman"; and, it concludes, the KGB "got its cooperation."

The *T.L.S.* appears to have forgotten that one cannot infer an empirical fact from a hypothetical statement; the inference can have no greater validity than the hypothesis on which it depends. If will not mutate to *is*. Logical difficulties of this kind, however, do not deter the *T.L.S.* and it proceeds triumphantly to a further conclusion; "It is, then, our contention that the real allies of the KGB are the zealots like R, who are unwilling or unable to demythologize Solzhenitsyn and consider him as a Russian writer instead of as the champion of their own pre-conceived cause." *Q.E.D.* indeed, only it is arrived at by a process of reasoning the fallacy of which would not escape a schoolboy.

TO BE UNVEILED as a collaborator and ally of the KGB at this late stage of my life (and when *ENCOUNTER* provided such a perfect refuge!) is of course something of a shock. For of course the *T.L.S.* might well contend that, though its argument is demonstrably false, its conclusion may nevertheless be true. But in this case it (and its readers) should recognise that its contention rests on nothing except its own bare assertion. It has seen a logical connection where none (or a different one) exists.

There are usually various reasons why this kind of error arises. Sometimes it is simply a case of logical incompetence. Sometimes it is because the argument has been invented to support a conclusion which has been arrived at on quite other grounds. Sometimes an irrational element has entered which has interfered with the reasoner's normal intellectual processes. I rather think that all three factors have been at work in this particular case. The irrational element, in particular, could perhaps be identified in the *T.L.S.*'s belief in the existence, to which it attaches great importance, of what it calls the "Solzhenitsyn myth", from which we must liberate ourselves, that is to say "demythologize Solzhenitsyn", before we can see him plain.

The *T.L.S.* is careful to explain that it does not use the word *myth* loosely, "as a synonym for false beliefs", but as "a shorthand for the bundle of stock attitudes and rhetoric which Solzhenitsyn's name commonly evokes." But in that case is the myth a shorthand for something which is true or false, for even "stock attitudes" and "rhetoric" may or may not have a basis in reality? Among the "stock attitudes" I would be inclined to include, for instance, the belief that Solzhenitsyn is an exceptionally gifted, perhaps a great writer; that his novels express a view of the Soviet state which the Soviet authorities go to every conceivable length to suppress; that by his own countrymen and by Russian scholars in the West he is regarded as a writer in the direct line of descent from a great Russian literary tradition. In the "rhetoric", perhaps, one ought to include the belief that Solzhenitsyn is an exceptionally brave, gifted, and truthful man who has been, and is being, shamefully mistreated and persecuted by the Soviet authorities, and that his case deserves our attention and sympathy, not only for his own sake, but because it is representative of thousands of others in the Soviet Union today.

In what sense do such beliefs imply a refusal "to consider [Solzhenitsyn] as a Russian writer"? It is precisely because he is a Rus-

sian who has written some marvellous novels that one believes them. But in any case, with which of these beliefs does the *T.L.S.* quarrel, and what evidence or argument does it offer to persuade one that they are false? Alas, one asks such questions in vain, because one of the oddest features of the *T.L.S.*'s reaction to the award of the Nobel Prize to Solzhenitsyn is its own resolute refusal to give any consideration to him as a writer or to his writings. In its first Commentary it ventured the tentative opinion that perhaps "on exclusively literary grounds" Solzhenitsyn did deserve the Nobel Prize. It subsequently made haste to assure us that "We intended, and made, no comment on the quality of the novels, nor about his qualities as a man, but restricted ourselves to commenting on what might be called, in résumé, the Solzhenitsyn myth."

The *T.L.S.* is more interested in the myth than in either the novels or their author. This is a curious attitude, to say the least, for what is primarily regarded as a journal of literary criticism. With the machinations of the KGB it feels perfectly at ease and at home and is willing to venture every kind of conjecture about them, but the literary merits of Solzhenitsyn are somehow beyond its competence. And this from a journal which has the effrontery to suggest that Solzhenitsyn's admirers refuse to consider him as a writer!

Yet the self-denying ordinance which the *T.L.S.* has applied to itself in respect of Solzhenitsyn's literary achievement becomes entirely understandable if one considers that, if it were relaxed, the *T.L.S.* could not avoid facing the question of how far the "myth" compares with the reality which Solzhenitsyn's novels describe. It is the novels and the reality, not the award of the Nobel Prize, which cause the *T.L.S.* embarrassment; it would like to wish both of them away. It is, I think, precisely because the *T.L.S.* does not wish to discuss such questions that it prefers to indulge in conjecture, speculation and hypothesis about the KGB and in a particularly clumsy form of logical legerdemain which purports to turn tentative guesses into established fact.

IT WOULD NOT, I think, have been worth while to pursue this controversy at such length if it did not also involve a larger area of disagreement between the *T.L.S.* and myself. After all, the *T.L.S.* thinks the West should apologise for the position of Solzhenitsyn. I think we should rather protest about it. I doubt if either course would have much effect on the KGB or the Soviet Writers Union, but in the past the second one has proved the more effective.

Still, the controversy has certain aspects which I think have some important implications for ourselves.

The *T.L.S.* projects into the minds of Solzhenitsyn's admirers in the West a certain "myth"; it is itself, however, obsessed with another myth, which it spends much time and effort in promoting. This is the myth of the "official" Kremlinologists, the "Kremlinological lobby", which, according to the *T.L.S.*, is largely responsible for the ideological distortion of Solzhenitsyn's writings in the West and thus acts as a willing collaborator of the KGB. Behind the Kremlinologists, of course, cowers a ragged army of over-zealous admirers like myself, who eagerly abet them in their nefarious work.

Of whom is the lobby composed, and what is the "official Kremlinological line", from which, according to Mr John Willett, assistant editor of the *T.L.S.*, (as quoted in the *Evening Standard*, 8 January 1971), it is "absolutely unforgivable" to differ; and again, in what sense, if any, is it "official"? What would they make of Georg Lukacs as a Marxian defender of Solzhenitsyn's work (as discussed by Martin Esslin elsewhere in this number)?

It would be hard to find any precise answers to these questions in the *T.L.S.*; but I take it that what it means by the "official" Kremlinologists is the general body of students of Russian affairs, in Europe and the United States, who since the War have added enormously to our knowledge of the Soviet state and its institutions, and on the whole, while differing on particular questions, agree on their interpretation of them.

It is not, I think, an exaggeration to say that the results of their studies have been to transform the image which the Soviet Union presents to the world, and that this transformation has itself had an immense political effect, both on individuals and governments. For that reason, they have been unwelcome both to those who, for a variety of reasons, would wish that image to be a favourable and flattering one and to some at least of those who, for good reasons, desire a relaxation of tension between the East and the West. For there are certain aspects of the Soviet state, if we accept them as fact, which make it rather improbable that there can ever be any genuine degree of sympathy or understanding between the two opposing systems.

The curious thing is that what gave the impetus to the growth of Russian studies in the West was the temporary wartime alliance between the Soviet Union and the Atlantic powers, which for the first time brought East

and West into working cooperation with one another. One effect of this was, on some at least of those who had the task of making the cooperation effective, to shatter any ideas they had previously held about the Soviet Union; on the other hand, the necessities of war inspired an immense output of propaganda representing the Soviet Union as a peace-loving, democratic state, presided over by the genial father-figure of Uncle Joe.

Post-war experience rapidly destroyed the credibility of such a view; at the same time it promoted a further intensification of interest in the Soviet Union, though this time not as an ally, but as a potential or actual enemy. This was as much a function of the Cold War as the collection of enemy intelligence is of a hot one. Western countries rapidly became persuaded that without a comprehensive and reliable body of knowledge about the Soviet Union, they would be at a considerable disadvantage.

As a result, large resources, human and financial, were diverted into promoting Russian studies in the West. University chairs and departments were founded, research institutes, libraries, language schools were established, individual scholars subsidised, international conferences and seminars encouraged; the body of learning and scholarship created by such efforts could be called "official" in the sense that, directly or indirectly, it depended on the resources and encouragement of Western governments, and for some people it has remained tainted by its origins, all the more so because the conclusions it embodies were on the whole not favourable to the Soviet Union.

On the other hand, the greater number of those who were engaged in this vast enterprise of investigating the origins, history, institutions and possible future of the Soviet Union, on the whole applied to their enquiries the same well-tried methods and techniques which have served the West well in other fields of knowledge; that is to say, they aimed at objectivity, as far as that can be achieved in such a subject, they preferred primary to secondary sources, they were suspicious of ideology, in whatever form, they judged documents in the light of what they were intended to achieve rather than what they said. They were encouraged in their task because, partly as a result of the war itself, an enormous mass of new material became available which at many points breached the wall of secrecy with which the Soviet Union sur-

rounds itself. German archives, including material captured in German-occupied Russia, provided a rich vein for research; manuscripts and memoirs hitherto unavailable or unpublished made their way to the West; successive splits, dissensions, purges, within the Soviet Union and its satellites persuaded many witnesses to publish their testimony; the temporary thaw initiated by Khrushchev, the release of thousands of victims from the Soviet labour camps, provided a flood of additional information.

The vast corpus of evidence which became available after the war forced a fundamental revision of many *idées reçues* (particularly of a Utopian kind) respecting the Soviet state, its origins, the Bolshevik Revolution and the part played in it by the Communist party and the proletariat, and the fundamental principles and policies which directed its institutions and controlled its policies. Among other things, it inspired younger scholars to cast a critical and sceptical eye on the work of their predecessors, like Sir Bernard Pares, E. H. Carr and Isaac Deutscher, who had hitherto been regarded as unchallengeable authorities and as accepted versions of the relations between Marxism, as a political and philosophical theory, and the state which claimed to be its offspring. Most of all, perhaps, it provoked a continuous confrontation between official Soviet versions of history, and of the conditions prevailing in the Soviet Union, and the verifiable facts. They did not often coincide.

It is, I think, this large body of knowledge which, as the result of the efforts of innumerable scholars, is now available to us with regard to the Soviet Union which the *T.L.S.* asks us to dismiss as the work of the "official" Kremlinologists and the "Kremlinologist's lobby." I say this because I cannot think of any other consistent and coherent body of knowledge in the West to which such a phrase could plausibly be applied; nor does the *T.L.S.* give any indication which might make one think otherwise.

But in advising us to dismiss the "official Kremlinological line" as tainted at its very source, the *T.L.S.* also implies that there is some purer fount of knowledge from which we can drink; and on which it presumably relies itself in forming its own views of Russian affairs, including Solzhenitsyn and the operations of the KGB. Yet where is it to be found?

R

Henry Fairlie

Walter Bagehot

or, the Political Journalist as Entertainer

THE IMMEDIATE APPEAL which Bagehot makes is not hard to understand. "Papa and I," he wrote to his mother at the age of twelve, "have such nice chats about Sir R. Peel and the little Queen"; and it is as nice chats about public affairs and public men that the collected essays and articles remain so fresh, even at a third or fourth reading. There is, of course, more to Bagehot than this. *The English Constitution* is a classic, which at last received the examination which it deserves in the penetrating introduction which R. H. S. Crossman contributed to the Collins Fontana edition in 1963.¹ *Lombard Street*, we are told by a variety of authorities, is also a classic, but I have never felt competent to judge. For the rest, there is his weekly and monthly journalism; and it is here, after the concentrated reading which the new edition of his works permits, that the doubt begins.

Bagehot, said G. M. Young, raised common sense to the power of genius. It is a comfortable and English thought. But if common sense is so raised, it ceases to be common sense; and this is exactly what happened with

Bagehot. He raised common sense to a principle, almost to a system, by which men and nations should govern themselves and their affairs. But common sense cannot bear such a weight and, in the process, what is commonsensical becomes nonsensical. Reading these essays and articles again, one is still captured by the marvellously quotable individual judgments, in which common sense is, indeed, raised to the power of epigram. But the total effect—the total scheme, if one may use so un-English an idea—is one of considerable contrariness.

Bagehot has been reviewed by succeeding generations of journalists and critics. (One understands George Saintsbury's impatience when, after a disparaging reference to Bagehot's literary criticism, he added a footnote to the effect that, if any reader had formed a higher estimate of Bagehot's work, he would not dissent.) But no reviewer has ever pointed out that what Bagehot said of Peel as a constitutional statesman can just as well be said of him as a political journalist: "a man of common opinions and uncommon abilities . . . the powers of a first-rate man and the creed of a second-rate man." Such may be the condition of all political journalists; and, once one accepts this, one can accept Bagehot. But it is precisely this that neither he nor his eulogists will allow us to accept. He himself exalted the press. Daily newspapers, weekly journals, monthly reviews: to him, they were a high attribute of a high civilisation: specifically of that civilisation which the middle class had created in England in the nineteenth century. The *Economist* and the *National Review* really

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Volumes I & II of the new edition of Bagehot's works were published in 1966; Volumes III & IV (also published by "The Economist"), which Henry Fairlie discusses, in 1968.

¹ First published in *ENCOUNTER*, March and April 1963.

were, to him, powers for good in the land; and he was a power for good in the *Economist* and the *National Review*. The garland he thus wove for himself, posterity has amiably placed on his brow.

BAGEHOT IS TODAY ENJOYING something of a vogue, much as Trollope did twenty years ago. (Perhaps his essays should be televised, like *The Forsyte Saga*.) The social and political order which they described has passed, yet we enjoy their celebrations of it. The reason is apparent enough. "Wherein," asked Michael Sadleir, "lies the strange potency" of the novels of Trollope? "It lies surely in his acceptance and his profound understanding of ordinary life. In the tale of English literature he is—to put the matter in a phrase—the supreme novelist of acquiescence." One is tempted to use the very same phrase about Bagehot: that he was a novelist of acquiescence. He likes to take a character and arrange a plot around him. This is the reason for the titles: "Adam Smith as a Person"; "What Lord Lyndhurst Really Was"; "Why Mr Disraeli has Succeeded." They are like the chapter headings of a Victorian novel, and one would not be in the least surprised if he had adapted Trollope's own title: "Harriet Martineau: Can We Forgive Her?" In fact—and no political journalist would criticise his good fortune—Bagehot had found a gimmick. By his title and his opening sentence, he stated his fictional problem. How could a man like Adam Smith write *The Wealth of Nations*? Actually, there is no problem. But he persuades us that there is, and his racy sketch follows.

Bagehot's primary concern, then, was with political character, and this is, of course, a particularly English obsession. No one in America is much interested in political character—hence, the need to talk of the politicians in terms of external attributes, such as "style"—but then no one in America reads Suetonius much. Mavericks—as in Richard H. Rovere's study of Joseph McCarthy—may be given attention but no one truly tries to explore the intricate political character of someone as important as J. William Fulbright. There is still no great American political biography—not even a great complete biography of Lincoln—and the difference in attitude between England and America is aptly illustrated by the difference between the titles of Bagehot's essays and the titles of Richard Hofstadter's equally brilliant (although so different in their execution) sketches of American statesmen: "Thomas Jefferson: the Aristocrat as Democrat"; "Andrew Jackson: and the Rise of Liberal Capitalism";

"John C. Calhoun: the Marx of the Master Class." They are not presented to us as characters, and no American could ever have written, or could write, Bagehot's sustained delineation, in his essay on Brougham, of all that makes the character of an agitator.

THIS DELIGHT in political character is itself a form of the deference which Bagehot noticed in the English people. They enjoy a character at the head of their affairs, and they will enjoy even a failure if he has character enough: hence, the number and the quality of the English biographies of minor political figures; each generation will have its life of Monckton Milne. No one has depicted political character with more facility than Bagehot, or has made it more apparent why the concern with it is a source of acquiescence, of deference, in a whole people. One should not, therefore, be surprised to find that Bagehot himself was acquiescent, indeed deferential. He knew the character of his subject: it was his own.

WALTER BAGEHOT came from Somerset, which is a mark in any man's favour. But it may also be said of him that he came *up* from Somerset. Like another Somerset man, John Locke, he was intent on making his way in the world, and he was not much disposed to spoil his chances by martyrdom. "I think I am with the majority—a healthy habit for a young man to contract," he wrote to his mother from Paris, at the time of the *coup d'état* in 1851. He would strive to be with the majority for the rest of his life, and he would all too easily succeed. One can read nothing about Bagehot—his letters, the memories of his family and his friends, the haunting early intimacy with Clough—without wondering how much of his spirit—sensitive, romantic, passionate—he crushed, in order to write *Lombard Street*.

Even on the evidence of the political journalism in these recent volumes, one cannot help asking what he might have been. His earliest journalism took the form of the "Letters on the French *Coup d'Etat* of 1851," which he contributed to the *Inquirer* at the age of twenty-five. They were audacious and provoking, not unlike the juvenilia by which new political journalists today announce their arrival in the columns of the *Spectator* or the *New Statesman*. But in the second of them, there is an authentic accent which was soon to be lost in his public writing, an accent of protest against the meaninglessness of the industrial civilisation which was being created

in Europe. He is at the point of arguing that employment in France depends on the Parisian trade, "the jewellery, the baubles, the silks, the luxuries," when he exclaims:

For this is the odd peculiarity of commercial civilisation. The life, the welfare, the existence, of thousands depends on their being paid for doing what seems nothing when done . . . people contrive to go out to their work, and to find work to employ them actually until the evening, body and soul are kept together, and this is what mankind have to show for their six thousand years of toil and trouble.

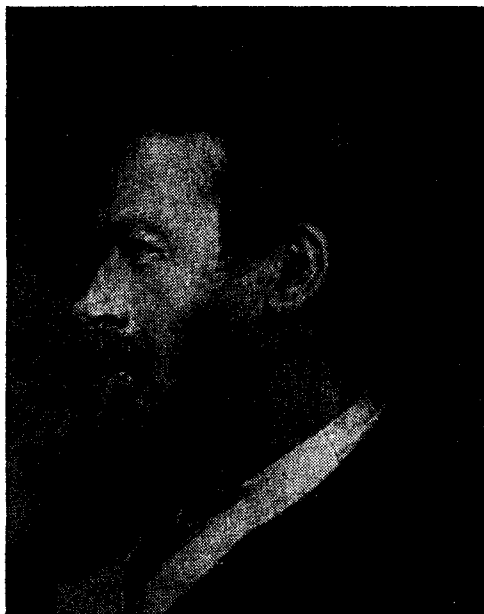
"To keep up this system," he adds, "we must sacrifice everything . . . ; at all hazards, and if we can, mankind must be kept alive." The protest is fierce—as fierce as one would expect of a man who was 17 when Carlyle published *Past and Present*—but the acquiescence is almost immediate. The system may be meaningless, but the system must be preserved, and it cannot be preserved without financial confidence. "No man liked to take a long bill; no one could imagine to himself what was coming. . . . Six weeks ago society was living from hand to mouth; now she feels sure of the next meal."

On these grounds, he acquiesced in the *coup d'état* of Louis Napoleon and (although with some later qualifications) in the Second Empire. So it was always to be: acquiescence in the industrial and commercial system which, "at all hazards, and if we can," must be preserved, and acquiescence in the man and the class—the man characterising the class—which could most surely preserve it. He saw very clearly—as clearly on some points, Crossman suggests, as Marx—but, seeing, he acquiesced. The end, given the class and the men to whom he deferred, could only be a wordly cynicism, in place of the vein of irony which lay within him. "Now of course it is true," he wrote in an essay on *The Wealth of Nations* in the last years of his life, "that there are some things, though not many things, more important than money." They would

understand that in Bradford. Adam Smith's writings had "caused more money to be made and prevented more money from being wasted than those of any other author." That would have meaning in Liverpool. *The Wealth of Nations* had "put certain broad conclusions into the minds of hard-headed men, which are all which they need to know." That would carry reassurance in Rochdale.

Why should we be surprised at all this? Bagehot, after all, "had the curious privilege of being born in a bank." (His parents, at the time of his birth, lived above the family bank, Stuckey's, in Langport.) Moreover, just as Bagehot's father had the common sense to

marry the niece of Samuel Stuckey, the founder of the bank, so Bagehot himself had the common sense to marry the daughter of James Wilson, the founder of the *Economist*. By the time he was thirty he had made something less than a fortune, but something more than a competence; and his acquiescence in the spirit of the middle class—who, he said in *The English Constitution*, "are in the present day the despotic power in England"—might seem to require no further explanation.



WALTER BAGEHOT

YET THE PUZZLE of his nature remains, as it is revealed in his letters and by his friends, and as it is partially revealed in some of his writings. "There seems," he protested again as a young man,

an unalterable contradiction between the human mind and its employments. How can a *soul* be a merchant? what relation to an immortal being have the price of linseed, the fall of butter, the tare on tallow, or the brokerage of hemp? Can an undying creature debit *petty expenses* and charge for carriage paid? . . . The soul ties its shoe; the mind washes its hands in a basin. All is incongruous.

The same spirit is to be found in the wonderful passage in which he takes Macaulay to task for "the chill nature" which prevented him from understanding the Cavalier character:

A Cavalier is always young. The buoyant life arises before us, rich in hope, strong in vigour,

irregular in action; men young and ardent, framed in the "prodigality of nature"; open to every enjoyment, alive to every passion; eager, impulsive; brave without discipline; noble without principle; prizing luxury, despising danger, capable of high sentiment. . . .

The greatness of this character is not in Mr Macaulay's way, and its faults are. Its licence affronts him; its riot alienates him. . . . He has no tears for that warm life, no tenderness for that extinct joy.

The whole passage, on the same note, is more than three pages long. Bagehot never wrote with this passion and ardour about the commercial class of his own day, even as he extolled them and their works; and, when he asks of the Cavalier, "Is the gushing life to be asked to construct a cistern?", it is a question one must, in turn, ask of him.

HE UNDERSTOOD SO MUCH; he believed so little: which again may be part of the condition of the journalist. Nothing is better in the biographical sketch of Bagehot which Norman St. John Stevas published in 1959 than the attention which he gave to Bagehot's religious views. He scorned the liberal concept of religion: "You cannot imagine a classical Isaiah; you cannot fancy a Whig St. Dominic; there is no such thing as a Liberal Augustine . . . Let us admire Liberalism in life but let us keep no terms with Paleyans in speculation." He puzzled over the origins of religious experience: "At the first struggle of our nature commences our religion." The Roman Catholic Church exercised a strong fascination over him; he declared that "the essence of Romanism is not in its ceremonies but in its doctrines"; he deeply admired Newman. He was, says St. John Stevas, a man of "strong inner religious faith". Yet one would scarcely know it from his political writings. This, too, was buried in his general acquiescence in the spirit of his age; and for the reason we may go back to that second letter from Paris, in which he proclaimed that, "at all hazards, and if we can, mankind must be kept alive." His fear was raw:

And observe, as time goes on, this fabric becomes a tenderer and tenderer thing. Civilisation can't bivouac; dangers, hardships, sufferings, lightly borne by the coarse muscle of earlier times, are soon fatal to noble and cultivated organisation. Women in early ages are masculine, and, as a return match, men of late years are becoming women.

It was a picture which haunted many Victorians; and, between the survival and disintegration of the fabric, what did Bagehot put as security? Bills of lading.

We should hardly be surprised, then, that Bagehot elevates the political character who will keep the system going. He is not much concerned with the back-bench member and when he is, it is with Samuel Robert Graves, the senior Conservative member for Liverpool from 1865 until 1873, who is praised, *as a minister might be praised*, for being "a consummate manager and manipulator of men":

Mr Graves was a warm negotiator. He could not help seeing what was in the minds of those with whom he was concerned. He adapted himself to it instinctively; was astonished that anyone could help seeing it. He was as pliable as a diplomatist could be. Indeed, an honest negotiator is the honestest of men, for it is in the making of delicate arrangements, and in the nice manipulation of men, that the highest honesty is tested most nicely.

This does not leave much room for a Charles James Fox; and, of course, Fox is given very sparing treatment by Bagehot. After all, one can imagine him asking, if he had written at length about Fox, *what did Fox do?* The answer is that, single-handed, he created a political—or, more accurately, a parliamentary—tradition of opposition which survives until this day. If governments need belabouring—and governments do need belabouring, as well as carrying on—it is someone in the image of Fox, and not of Pitt, who will rise to do the work. Bagehot found him uninteresting, as he would have found, say, Sidney Silverman or Michael Foot uninteresting in our day; and one must notice again that this concern with government and not opposition is itself a form of acquiescence and deference.

His primary interest, then, was the characters of those who rule. Since he was aware—and how could he not be aware, given the great clash between the landed and the commercial interests which dominated English politics in the middle of the nineteenth century?—of the importance of class as a determining factor in politics, he then made the connection which was to become his theme. The character of a politician—his political character, his character *as a politician*—is the expression of class: not of the class from which he comes, although that may happen to be true, but of the class which he aspires to lead. It may not seem a very profound insight, but Bagehot pursued it with both brilliance and perversity. At the beginning and end of the biographical essays stand Bolingbroke and Disraeli, both of whom found the country party "in a state of dumb power", and each of whom "became at once important in Parliament, because he was the eloquent spokesman of many inaudible

voices". That is a moderate statement to which there can be no exception. But, in between, the main body of the essays covers the politicians in whom the new commercial interest found its voice, and at once the theme takes on a new importance: or, rather, it mutates into his most familiar, his most frequently repeated, assertion, that the constitutional statesman must express the creed of the average man. This assertion is so often quoted, and so often praised, that we must be clear what it meant to Bagehot. It is not nearly so innocent as it at first seems.

There is no questioning its importance to Bagehot. He says it of Pitt: "the successful power to give in a more than ordinary manner the true feelings and sentiments of ordinary men." He says it of Peel, in the famous phrases already quoted, and pushes the point home: "Public opinion . . . rules; and public opinion is the opinion of the average man." He manages to twist the point round, and say it even of Palmerston: "He was not a common man, but a common man might have been made out of him. He had in him all that a common man has and something more." He says it when he speaks of Gladstone: "In a free country, we must use the sort of argument which plain men understand." Moreover, this theme, so persistently reiterated, is closely connected to another: his praise of "stupidity" as a virtue in a free people. Why did a clever man so exalt the average man, and then go a step further, and exalt him for his stupidity?

Succeeding generations of clever men have found the argument seductive. But we must realise that all his talk of "the average man" obscures the fact that Bagehot was not talking of public opinion as we understand it at all. We do not imagine that public opinion is as uniform and as coherent as Bagehot suggests: even in public opinion polls, we attend to income groups, social groups, age groups, regional groups. Bagehot was able to talk readily of the common opinion of ordinary men because he was talking of a single class, which was then unusually uniform and coherent: the industrial and commercial and, to some extent, the professional middle class of England: the class for which he wrote and which he gratified. When he talks of politicians who had a following outside this class, he no longer says that they represented the common creed of average men; he stipulates their class, and does not identify the class as the nation of average men: thus Derby is described as "one who talks the political dialect of English country gentlemen." As for the

working class, it is nowhere conceded that they had any opinion at all. By his criteria, he was right: they had no opinion which could find any political voice, either in Parliament or in the newspapers and reviews he revered.

It is fallacious, therefore, to take Bagehot's theme and say that it is valid as a generally applicable description of the character of a constitutional statesman. He was talking of the constitutional statesman required by a specific class at a particular moment: "The middle classes—the ordinary majority of educated men [who] are in the present day the despotic power in England." Moreover, it was this which he could not maintain after the Reform Act of 1867. As his introduction to the second edition of *The English Constitution* and some of the later essays show, he understood what had happened as a result of the Act; but what had happened had also destroyed the picture of the constitutional statesman which he had carefully drawn in earlier years. He had never been able to take the measure of Disraeli, who flew in the face of the opinion of "the ordinary majority of educated men" of the mid-Victorian middle class. But, now, he saw that even Gladstone—especially Gladstone—was reaching to a new audience, and doing something quite other than expressing *their* common opinion. Gladstone's speech at Greenwich in 1871, he said "marks the coming of the time when it will be one of the most important qualifications of a prime minister to exert a direct control over the masses." One should notice that word, *control*: it introduces a new concept which is a direct contradiction of the character of the constitutional statesman he depicted before 1867.

IN SHORT, Bagehot described the politics of a dominant class and the character of the politicians who suited it. The apparatus of the state, he said with abundant clarity, is in the hands of one economic class, and the men who managed that apparatus represented the character of that class. They are men of uncommon abilities, who give expression to *its* common opinions. His fault, partly the result of the brilliance of his prose, was that he was not satisfied with describing what he saw, but translated it into a model, and provided a model political character to fit into it. Bagehot has too often been praised for the acuteness of his observation, for putting things down as he saw them. He was no better at that than the rest of us, perhaps a little worse. The models which he had created possessed

him and, because of their clarity as models, have possessed us.

THE POWER OF THESE MODELS is evident in some of the more obvious tricks of his writing. His reiteration of his themes, over so many years, is itself suggestive. Did things really change so little, either during the century he wrote about, or during the quarter of a century when he wrote? When he says the same things about so many different people, as in the quotations given above, are we not justified in thinking that his models were exercising too strong a fascination over him? Moreover, can we not see how he uses these models in a further trick which the editing of St. John Stevas disdains to notice?

From time to time, while reading these volumes, one comes across an unattributed quotation. There it is, between quotation marks, and usually introduced with a salute. The thing, he says, has been put well and cannot be put better. They are, of course, quotations from himself, and it would have been sensible as well as good-humoured of St. John Stevas to notice the fact in his footnotes. All journalists, of course, repeat themselves. But Bagehot's unique method—offering a quotation as if it comes from another expert, wise and authoritative—seems to be more than a stylistic trick. It is part of the whole equipment with which he constructs his models: the impersonal criteria are established—this is what everyone of common sense knows to be true—and the personal judgments are then presented to the unwary reader.

If we look at the major biographical essays, and at some of the shorter biographical articles, we can see how the models distort, at the same time (no one, needless to say, would deny this) as they instruct and entertain. Two of his subjects—Bolingbroke and Pitt—lived and acted before Bagehot's own time; and it is generally agreed that these are the least satisfactory essays. Both men are judged—Bolingbroke, on the whole, unfavourably; Pitt, on the whole, favourably—as if they were acting within the model political system which Bagehot had constructed. He accuses Bolingbroke of failing to observe “how few and plain are the alternatives of common business,” which may have been true of the middle years of the nineteenth century, and may even be true today, but was certainly not true of a period when the Whig settlement had not been firmly established; when the Hanoverian succession had not been ac-

complished and, when accomplished, had not been made safe; and when the first Stuart attempt to regain the throne had still to be met and defeated. The unsatisfactory essay on Pitt suffers from the same attempt to judge him as a model constitutional statesman within Bagehot's model political system: Pitt is, in some respects, admirable, and what is admirable belongs, not to his own times, but to Bagehot's; he was “the first English minister who discussed political questions with the cultivated thoughtfulness and considerate discretion which seem to characterise us now,” a remark of such impudence and cocksureness that one would not believe it could have been made if one did not know already that it had been made by Bagehot.

In his essay on Brougham, he moves near to his own age: Brougham “must be praised for having inculcated, in the horrid heat of the day, as a boring paradox what is now a boring commonplace.” It is a brilliant essay, in which Bagehot pins the wings of a radical agitator as if he were a butterfly. He moves from understanding to sardonic observation with an ease which is enviable. As a reformer, Brougham “is not absorbed in a creed: he is pricked by facts”, and he “has enough of misanthropy to be a philanthropist.” As a “miscellaneous agitator,” he suffers from “the want of a thinking intellect”; he must be ready “to catch at any thing, to attack every thing, to blame any one,” or else “the moment of action would be gone.” An agitator “must err by excess.... There is a certain coarseness in the abusive breed”; he should have “hard nerves.... Very nice nerves would shrink from a scattered and jangled life.” As for the facts on which the agitator relies, there is “something ridiculous in being the Mirabeau of sums.... An agitator's detail is scarcely to be trusted... on points of detail it is ridiculous to be in a passion.” Would he, Bagehot finally asks, “sit *still* upon the Woolsack?”

It is all to the point, and one would not like to be without it. But there is a note in the essay which is disturbing. Is not Bagehot's real objection to Brougham an objection to his dullness? “Lord Brougham is prose itself”; his speeches “have the most unpardonable of faults—the fault of dullness.... He has shattered his contemporaries, but he will not charm posterity.” (Indeed, he does not; we do not read his collected speeches.)

A certain nonchalant ease pervades our modern world, [says Bagehot, in one of the many passages in which he seems to be describing himself]; we affect an indifference we scarcely feel; our talk is light, almost to affectation; our best

writing is the same; we suggest rather than elaborate, hint rather than declaim.

But is this ever the manner of the reformer? If he has shattered his contemporaries, why should he bother whether he will charm posterity? Moreover, even if it is a little ridiculous to be a "Mirabeau of sums," were not sums the very basis of the 19th-century political economy in Britain which Bagehot admired so much, and especially of the free-trade system which he exalted. Cobden built his free-trade oratory on sums; Gladstone's great free-trade budget was only finicky sums; and all those blue books, the basis of the good government which Bagehot and the *Economist* continually praised, what were they but sums? In his desire to entertain, Bagehot too often wants it both ways.

HIS SKETCH OF Althorp, to whom he gives much of the credit for the passage of the Reform Bill of 1832, is again a masterpiece. If Brougham could not sit still upon the Woolsack, Althorp achieved what he did by sitting still and saying next to nothing. No doubt, says Bagehot, "the slow-speeched English gentlemen rather sympathised with slow speech in others. Besides, a quick and brilliant leader is apt to be always speaking, whereas a leader should interfere only when necessary." His mind ought to be

always of stable value. And this Lord Althorp's mind was; there was not an epigram in the whole of it; everything was solid and ordinary. Men seem to have trusted him much as they trust a faithful animal, entirely believing that he would not deceive if he could, and that he could not if he would.

But, in the end, Bagehot questions these qualities. Writing the essay nine years after the passage of the Reform Bill of 1867, which filled him with fear and despondency, he criticises Althorp and his colleagues for having common sense "without culture," and therefore being unable to perceive the consequences of what they did. "Common sense no doubt they have, but common sense without instruction can no more wisely revise old institutions than it can write the nautical Almanac." Again, one feels cheated. Again, Bagehot wants it both ways.

With his famous essay on Peel, he arrives in his own times. Both as a description of Peel himself and as a description of the model constitutional statesman, it alone crowns Bagehot as the greatest political journalist Britain has known. It is observant, of course; but it is primarily polemical. He does injury to Peel,

paragraph by paragraph, and then adds insult. "From a certain peculiarity of intellect and fortune, he was never in advance of his time. . . . He was converted at the conversion of the average man." He was the model of "the working adaptive man" on whom providence bestows "a quiet adoptive nature. He receives insensibly the suggestions of others; he hears them with willing ears; he accepts them with placid belief. . . . He never would have been a great thinker; he became a great agent." His speeches were plausible rather than persuasive: "The word which fits his oratory is—specious. . . . an average style adapting itself to what the speaker believed and what he disbelieved." So the injuries and the insults continue. "A calm and bland nature like that of Peel is peculiarly prone to self-illusion. . . . a quiet and calm nature, when it is tempted by its own wishes, is hardly conscious that it is tempted." Yet this is the man, according to Bagehot, who "purified the Tory Party"; and again one wonders where Bagehot stands.

IN *The Life of Politics*, I have criticised Bagehot's model of the constitutional statesman. It seems to me altogether too facile, and I cannot fit two constitutional statesmen of our own time, Hugh Gaitskell and Harold Macmillan, into it. They were not converted at the conversion of the average man; as far back as the 1930s, they led him. The truth is that, in "The Character of Sir Robert Peel," the most satisfying of the biographical essays, because in it he argued his theme most satisfactorily, one can see his intention quite clearly: its originality and its narrowness. He brilliantly identified the *character* of Peel with the *character* of the class which he represented. After a long apprenticeship as "the nominee of a nobility," during which he served *its* interests, "he became the representative of a transacting and trading multitude." His character "happily fitted him to be the chosen head" of this new class, "imperiously bent on its own ideas," and to be the head of that class "in shifting and changing times." That is all that he said—and it is most valuable—yet he converted this narrow, if original, point into a general, and specious, description of the character of constitutional statesman, and we have followed him. Part of the reason is that his language is inexact: a gloss. In the last of his sentences quoted above, he does not talk of class, although he has done so previously and this is what he means. He talks of "a political community"; and, even

if not deliberately, the phrase is distorting. The dominant class is too easily represented as the political nation—Marx, as Crossman observes, would have approved—and Bagehot can lead himself and his reader to his almost irresistible conclusion: “We must hope for no better man. You have excluded the profound thinker; you must be content with what you can obtain—the business gentleman.” Why should the business gentlemen he addressed object?

His two short articles on Palmerston amount to little—he could not grasp the man—but, in his essay on Cobden, he is once again in his own time and on his own ground. Cobden should have been one of his heroes. He did more than any other man to establish the free-trade system. But Bagehot, with apparent objectivity, searches out Cobden’s defects: “He has travelled widely, but among a special class. He has been *consigned*”—Bagehot made cunning use of the language of the commercial class—“from Free-trader to Free-trader.” It is an apt comment, but his reasons for making it are less acceptable. Bagehot was a snob—Cobden “is like a clever boy from a small school. . . . At a university these idiosyncrasies are rubbed off”—and he was an insider: “His position as an *outsider* has caused the principal defects of Mr Cobden’s career. Such a position teaches a man nothing. Responsible office, and even responsible opposition, teach much.” It is in such observations that Bagehot gives himself away. For all his understanding of the working of the system—for all his dry observation of the politicians who run it—he himself was at the heart of it, a responsible insider believing in office rather than opposition. Again, one must say that Bagehot cheats: that he wants it both ways.

BRIGHT, in a series of short articles, receives the acclaim denied to Cobden, but let us notice the reason:

The great “tribune of the people,” as he used to be called, has mellowed in later life into a statesman who, though he has not deserted one of his old principles, has gained the reputation of standing on the ancient ways in his mode of supporting them. . . . Mr Bright is, with all his reputation for passion and vehemence of speech, a thoroughly sober, and, in a certain sense, even Conservative, politician. . . . His presence therefore in Parliament, and his presence as an independent member, will do more than anything to moderate that irritability of desire for change which has attacked some of the younger members of the party.

We know the voice. It is usually reserved for obituaries, especially for the kind of obituaries which are spoken by responsible men of a

reformer who, although he is still alive, is no longer kicking, who has soberly and safely chosen to stand on ancient ways.

IN HIS FILIAL ESSAY on his father-in-law, James Wilson, Bagehot celebrates the responsible insider most thoroughly: “the whole of his life . . . proves that he possessed an unusual capacity for affairs—an extraordinary *transacting* ability.” (There is the vocabulary of the commercial class again.) He “dealt with political economy like a practical man. . . . Mr Wilson’s predominating power was what may be called a business-imagination. . . . Political economy was to him the science of buying and selling, and of the ordinary bargains of men he had a very steady and distinct conception.” (It is not surprising that, in this celebration of his father-in-law and his benefactor, we are at the core of Bagehot’s attitudes.) As one of the Secretaries of the Board of Control, he “certainly elaborated . . . the peculiar form of state guarantee upon the faith of which so many millions of English capital have been sent to develop the industry of India.” On a parliamentary committee, he “appeared to great advantage.” As Financial Secretary to the Treasury, he “was perfectly sure to be right in a plain case; and by far the larger part of the ordinary business of the Government, as of individuals, consists of plain cases,” and his “mercantile knowledge and mercantile sympathies were found to be of much use in the consolidation of the customs in 1853.”

When he went to India, as Financial Member of the Council, James Wilson himself almost parodied the attitudes of his class. “He was much struck with the capabilities of the country, and wrote to England almost in so many words, ‘that it was a fine country to *tax*,’” but he recognised the difficulties: “it would be absurd to fancy that we can place as much reliance upon the veracity of orientals as upon that of Englishmen.” (The words are Bagehot’s, apparently paraphrasing the views of Wilson.) In another letter to a friend, Wilson wrote: “Firmness and justice are the only policy for India;—no vacillation, or you are gone. They like to be governed and respect an iron hand,” and he called for “A great police system of semi-military organisation but usually of purely civic application.” All these are, of course, the attitudes of a class but both Wilson and Bagehot represent them as common sense. On subjects of moral difficulty, concludes Bagehot, he “was somewhat intolerant of speculative reasoning. ‘The common sense is so and so’, he used to say,

and he did not wish to be plagued with anything else." This is Bagehot describing himself again: exposing his own flaw.

LASTLY, ONE COMES to the long series of essays and articles on Gladstone and Disraeli. What does the greatest political journalist of his time have to say about its greatest politicians? Disappointingly—and perhaps significantly—little. Whatever else Gladstone and Disraeli were—and they were both frauds up to a point—they reached far beyond Bagehot's description of the constitutional statesman: neither of them merely gave expression to the common opinion of their day. Gladstone could not be confined to the mercantile interests of the class from which he came and which he at first represented. Disraeli developed an eccentric, but original and powerful, vision of England which can have meant little to the squires and the gentry whom he at first led. Both of them were originals. Both of them transcended their time, their parties, and even themselves. Both of them elude Bagehot: he chatters about them with chic and incomprehension.

Bagehot, describing Brougham's sketches of British statesmen, says that he is "a fine painter of the exterior character." Faced with Gladstone and Disraeli, it is the exterior character which Bagehot draws. As a popular orator, Gladstone was "sure, if they only knew what he knows, they would feel as he feels, and believe as he believes. And by this he conquered. This living faith... is an extreme power in human affairs. . . . Mr Gladstone has this incentive in perhaps an excessive and dangerous measure." (Another interesting feature of Bagehot's style is the frequent shifting of tense: from present to past to present, as if he were writing through his contemporaries in order to charm posterity.) Gladstone had, and it is one of Bagehot's unforgettable phrases, "an elastic heroism about him." He

has not an adhesive mind; such adhesiveness as he has is rather to projects than to principles. . . . He lays down a principle of tremendous breadth to establish a detail of exceeding minuteness. . . . He will believe easily.

It is all said very well, but it says nothing that was not commonly said by Gladstone's critics. We are given the exterior character.

Perhaps the fallacy of the model which Bagehot constructed is nowhere exposed more clearly than in his equation of Gladstone with Peel. "Neither Sir Robert Peel nor Mr Gladstone can of course be put in the first order of statesmen," which leaves one asking who,

in Bagehot's view, can be put there. But more important than this abrupt dismissal is the fact that Bagehot reaches for the same language to describe Gladstone as to describe Peel. "He has what we may call an adaptive mind" is a direct echo from the essay on Peel. Moreover, the same explanation is provided—"An English statesman in the present day lives by following public opinion"—although Gladstone, for all his flexibility, both led and opposed the public opinion of his day in a way in which it is inconceivable that Peel would ever have done. It is not surprising that Bagehot scorns the Oxford Movement—while admiring Newman—which, more than anything else, widened Gladstone's horizons and hence those of the insularly mercantile party which he led: it "has wrecked many fine intellects, has broken many promising careers," and it left upon Gladstone's intellect "a weakening strain and a distorting mark." Did it?

OF DISRAELI, he again says no more than his contemporaries were commonly saying. "We have invariably observed that whenever Mr Disraeli has received a check, it has been the herald of a great advance." He combined "individual tenacity of purpose with a flexibility and pliancy of intellect." He "has never had a public faith—he probably does not know what one means." He possessed "nothing of the statesman's power of penetrating to the heart of a deep national conviction." But this is precisely what Disraeli did possess, however exotic his manner of doing so. At one point, Bagehot is near to admitting this, when he says that his mind, "as far as it penetrates, [is] original." At least even Bagehot could not pretend that Disraeli merely followed and expressed the common opinion of his time; which is why he could not comprehend him.

There is no need, here, to follow in detail the essays and articles which are included in the second of the volumes I am discussing. They have two subjects: the French *coup d'état* of 1851 and the subsequent career of Napoleon III, and the Civil War in America. On both of them, he misjudged badly. He supported the *coup d'état* of Louis Napoleon, because it restored confidence in "the security of that industry which is the condition of social life and civilised cultivation"; and "I fear it must be said that no legal or constitutional act could have given such confidence." He supported Napoleon III's restrictions on civil and political liberties by the specious argument that "the French Emperor follows the opinions of France, and that there-

fore to a not inconsiderable extent, France, notwithstanding appearances, is a free country." He even supported the Emperor's military adventure in Mexico. As time went on, he became disillusioned with the character of Napoleon III. But, even after the collapse of the Second Empire, he was still attracted by it as the form of government most suited to the French. In short, he regarded the French as fit only for Gaullism, and it is not surprising that Norman St. John Stevas, in his preface, writing before the fall of de Gaulle, says: "We have had to wait until our own time to see his opinions on France vindicated." Um!

Like many of his contemporaries in Britain, Bagehot feared the imperialism of the United States; its restless conviction that it had a "manifest destiny" to occupy an entire continent. (This was one of the reasons why he supported Napoleon III's escapade in Mexico: it would create a barrier to American ambition.) This was—and it remains—a wholly respectable attitude. But Bagehot, in following the course of the Civil War, allowed it to distort his judgment. Until very late, he assumed that the Union "will be, or already is dissolved." Until very late, he wholly misread the character of Lincoln, arguing that he must, "from his previous life and defective education, be wanting in the liberal acquirements and mental training which are the principal elements of an enlarged statesmanship": a perfect example of the inadequacy of his model of a constitutional statesman. From start to finish, he misunderstood the constitution of the United States—its extraordinary capacity for development—and he ignored the manner in which, by his interpretation of its "war power," Lincoln took all the authority he required. Few misjudgments of a political journalist can have been so great as his expressed opinion that "there is no head at Washington."

In his comments on both the Second Empire in France and the Civil War in America, Bagehot exposed the fallacy which lay in the models which he constructed. He had many insights into the nature of politics and into the character of politicians. But, out of these insights, he constructed models of efficient political institutions and of efficient constitutional statesmen which were relevant only to the Britain of his generation, but which he insularly insisted were relevant to other countries and to other times. As the result of the seduction of his writings, to which we cannot help falling victims, we too easily follow him in his fallacy.

WALTER BAGEHOT is far too important in the history of British political journalism to leave it there. These first volumes of his collected works force even the most modest practitioner of the trade to consider in what it consists. His influence lies—one cannot say heavily: his lightness is both his strength and his weakness—across us all. If this was political journalism at its best, can we—and, more important, should we—in our age practise it? Has he misled us, by the iridescence of his writing, into a totally false view of British politics and our purpose in commenting on them? The political column in Britain today, which was recreated in the *Spectator* fifteen years ago, and whose revival has influenced all other forms of political journalism, owes much to him. It is highly personal; it is racy; it offers glimpses of politics from the inside; it is concerned with, and delights in, political character; it takes a sardonic but, on the whole, affectionate view of British political institutions; and it barely varies from journal to journal. The total effect—and distance from Britain, so that I read the British press on the banks of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal, perhaps gives me some advantage here—is much the same as the effect created by Bagehot which I described at the beginning: a weekly serial of "nice chats about Sir R. Peel and the little Queen"; and some of us are more to blame than others.

If we turn, then, to Bagehot, as the almost undisputed master of our trade, does his example offer any illumination? Unfortunately, it does. It is unfortunate, because a protracted reading of his political journalism leaves one, in the end, with an impression of levity; and one suspects that a protracted reading of all the political columns in Britain in the past fifteen years would have the same effect. What Bagehot says cannot be separated from how he says it. "His speeches," he wrote of Bright, "are very amusing reading, and, as a rule, those are best known to posterity who can amuse posterity." The sentence and the sentiment are characteristic: seductive but false. Walpole? Pitt? Peel? Russell? Gladstone? They are hardly men who amuse us, yet it is they whom we best know. As so often, Bagehot is describing himself under the pretence of describing his subject. With some justification, he looked forward to his fame in posterity more self-consciously than any political journalist today can think it pertinent to do; and he would make sure of it by entertaining.

We may excuse him that vanity. But was it not also his purpose *first* to entertain his contemporary audience: the new commercial

class for which he primarily wrote and the *Economist* was primarily published? He teased it, but he never teased it unmercifully. He always left it with a leg, and sufficient firm ground, to stand on. Was his trick of adapting the language of practical business to describe the life of politics not intended to reassure it? Mr Bagehot, one can even now hear them saying in Manchester or Leeds, would have his little flights of fancy—that passage about Byron in “The Character of Sir Robert Peel”—but, in the end, he returned to talking about public affairs in terms of *transaction*. Was this not part of his skill in writing *pour épater la bourgeoisie*? How he titillated them! How he would pull the leg of the Royal Family; but it should remain. How sardonically he observed the dignified, as well as efficient, aspects of the House of Commons; but they should be allowed to stay. Peel was narrow and shallow; but “you must be content with what you can obtain—the business gentleman.” There was no reason why the merchants and the mill-owners should not sleep with easy consciences in their large houses, above the slums they had created, when the clever Mr Bagehot in London told them that there was no other way.

On the one side, Bagehot scoffed at the dumb country gentleman—“The grade of gentry who fill the country seats. . . are perhaps the least able and valuable part of English society”—and, on the other, he would keep the grades below the commercial class dumb, by opposing any significant extension of the suffrage. This left the merchants and the mill-owners securely established, not least in their own estimation. Even the manner in which he defined his subject gave reassurance. He was, said Keynes,

a psychological analyser, not of the great or of genius, but of those of middle position, and primarily of business men, financiers and politicians. . . . To the analyst whose gifts lay in the observation of what was neither too high nor too low, and who was not specially equipped for the understanding of genius and violent feeling on the one hand, or of servitude, confinement and distress on the other, what in the 'sixties of the last century, could offer so absorbing a field as those superior members of the British middle class who ruled in Lombard Street and Westminster?”

Bagehot could not grasp greatness. Hence, the misjudgment of Lincoln: he revised his opinion only after the assassination. Hence, the misconception of Palmerston: that “a common man might have been cut out of him.” (If one can believe that, as Wellington

said, one can believe anything). Hence, the misinterpretation of Gladstone: the suggestion that he had merely the same “adaptive nature” as Peel. Hence, the mistreatment of Disraeli: as a limited literary genius acting in politics. Before he could observe them, Bagehot had to cut his characters down to his own size.

In the pastureland of Somerset where he was born and died, there are no great peaks and no great valleys. His style is the same. It flows as gently, and sparkles as merrily, as the river Parret on which he first opened, and at the end closed, his eyes. If one relied on his writings alone, copious as they are, one would know next to nothing of the social and intellectual ferment of the time in which he lived. One comes away from them hardly believing that, when he was at the height of his powers, Matthew Arnold was publishing *Culture and Anarchy* and John Ruskin was blasting his contemporaries with *Time and Tide*: that he followed Carlyle. If his virtue, as his admirers claim, was that he set down what he saw, then one must say that he saw very little; and, in what he saw, he acquiesced with little more than a wry amusement.

THIS ACQUIESCENCE was extended to the past. He had a lackadaisical attitude to the great issues which had mattered to it. “The Bill,” he said, talking of the Reform Bill of 1832, “is to us hardly more than other bills.” Again, in another essay, “Who now doubts on the Catholic question? It is no longer a ‘question’.” Issues and questions do not die in this manner; and, in the end, his own opposition to the Reform Bill of 1867 compelled him to reconsider the “characteristic defects” of the Reform Bill of 1832. “While these lingered in the books they were matters of dull teaching, and no one cared for them; but Mr Disraeli has embodied them, and they are living among us. The traditional sing-song of eulogy is broken by a sharp question.” This is among the most revealing sentences he wrote. “The traditional sing-song of eulogy” to the Reform Bill of 1832 had never been universal. There were many who had foreseen at the time, and who had continued for a generation to foretell, its almost certain consequences. But Bagehot was not interested until it was too late, until the consequences had been embodied in another Reform Bill, and were “living among us.” When political journalism is drained, to this extent, of intellectual commitment—of ideology, if one will—does it not become all sail and no anchor? Is this not the searching question which Bagehot compels us to ask?

THE POLITICAL COLUMN as we practise it in England today is a great success, and it has many virtues, some of them more serious than the ones which I have listed above. There is nothing like it in the political journalism of any other country, not even in the columns of Richard Rovere and Murray Kempton in the United States, which most nearly resemble it. It takes *much* of its character, as did Bagehot's journalism, from *much* of the character of English politics; and, since English politics are not to be despised, nor is the English political column which describes them. But there is a flaw in it, and I believe that it is the same flaw as in Bagehot's political journalism; that is why an extended examination of his method—his manner—may help us.

The criticisms which I have made of Bagehot are substantial, and they may be starkly summarised by returning to the point which I made at the beginning: that the common sense for which he is so often praised turned too regularly into considerable nonsense. It was not common sense to ignore the evils of the industrial revolution. (Even Macaulay, for all his complacency about them, realised that he had to answer the critics, as he did in his polemic against Southey.) It was not common sense to defend the "instructed" against the "uninstructed", and fail to see, as Arnold did, that the new class which he regarded as "instructed" was not such at all. (He darkly confronted the truth in 1867: hence his remark that the men of 1832 had been "without culture".) It was not common sense so to misunderstand the forces which were active in Ireland that he could write, "We confess that the temporary anger of the Irish Protestants—and it can only be temporary—seems to us insignificant," and that "Ireland will not gain the repeal of the Union." (Has any of us made a more lapidary misjudgment of a major issue?) It

was not common sense so to misread the American constitution that he did not, until it was proved, understand the strength of the leadership which it could provide. It was not common sense so to misinterpret the character and system of Napoleon III that he did not, until it also was proved, understand the "Caesarism", and the weaknesses of "Caesarism", which must be their unavoidable consequences. If all this—and much else that I have mentioned—is common sense raised to the power of genius, then all one can anxiously ask is to be rid of the genius or the common sense; one or the other.

One is not complaining that he was wrong—it is better within limits, to be wrong than to say nothing—but that he exalted a practical—a non-intellectual—approach to the politics of his day which excluded almost every great issue. He could no more grasp a great issue than he could grasp a great man. If one wishes to understand the politics of his age, one will learn more from Arnold or Ruskin, from Mill or Maine, than from all his journalism.

As I said at the beginning, I do not believe that this was necessarily what he might have been. Almost everything he wrote contains the hints of the repression which I mentioned, of that terrible early admission to his mother: "I think I am with the majority—a healthy habit for a young man to contract." I am not, moreover, carping at so enviable a talent. My fear is merely that we are, lesser than he, in the same condition. We titillate, we entertain, we write *pour épater la bourgeoisie* (in the weeklies, in the quality Sundays, on television), and it is as profitable now as in his day. But meanwhile, beyond the political processes which we describe with a thoroughness which amounts to an intellectual acquiescence, wild voices can be heard, saying ignorantly and impatiently, what we have failed to say with instruction and consideration.

Foreign Parts

At the Frontier Post : Om

Under the one step up into the hut
A toad broods by the sergeant's shabby boots.
A single light bulb, acid and unshaded,
Marks out, inside, a function of the state
As well as marking where one road has ended.

Slogans ("To be on guard is half the battle")
Assure the walls if not the occupants.
Only behind a door do I catch glimpses
Of cruder appetites: a brown thigh, supple
With bourgeois blandishments, coyly entices.

Ripped from some old *Paris Match* or *Playboy*,
This functionary's unofficial decor
Cheers me a little as I sit and wait
While name and date of birth and date of entry
Are slowly copied to a dossier sheet.

Outside, between the frontier posts, the hills
Are black, unpeopled. Hours of restlessness
Seep from the silence, silt across the road.
At last the sergeant puts away his files,
Hands me my papers. And I see the toad

Hop into darkness, neutral and unstopped,
Companion of the brown-thighed cover girl
Hidden behind the door, beyond the frontier,
Where appetite and nature are adept
At moving quietly, or at staying still.

Anthony Thwaite

J. T. on his Travels

Perhaps you thought she was a child
Perhaps you thought you liked the thought

She doesn't pretend to be a virgin
Her son is lying on the only bed

Almost her size, she carries him
Still sleeping to a next-door cupboard

She brings a bucket of water back
To give herself a local wash

You feel you prefer your own french letter
Hers look secondhand

You she will wash hereafter
If you last that long

Either way you are damned—
If you manage it, for unfeelingness

If you don't, for lack of feeling
John Thomas, old Whitey, you can't win.

D. J. Enright

The International Bar

Girl opposite eyes you up,
her glass is empty
so is her face.
Must be an "International Bar"
in every city you think
and decide to give
the next one a miss.

Kerry McKenzie

Homecoming

Nothing had changed

Wandering once more
through the village
he ticked them off
one by one
in his mind's inventory

The mossy kampong well
cloistered by trees
where the fledgling girls
cocooned in flimsy sarongs
gathered like thieves
each morning
to bathe
before cock's crow
before the young men awoke

The dark teetering huts . . .

The flickering oil lamps
around which the small boys
pressed
like moths
each evening
to hear the old fisherman's tales

That source of never-ending wonder
the fresh water spring
by the hill
where the older women
clutching
bundles of dirty linen
waited patiently
in straggling queues

Those shallow broken drains
of stagnant water
mosquito larva
ribbons
of children's excreta

Those zinc latrines
with spilling buckets
black nebulae of buzzing flies
retch-inducing
emanations

They were all there
Each in its allotted place
Exactly the way he knew it
Exactly the way he left it

But though a nostalgic heart
rejoiced
that childhood landmarks
were still there
that other soul screamed
What! Has nothing changed?

C. Rajendra

Professors may expect tyranny

The girl students on the campus
have decided that they are
the most liberated generation
and have said goodbye to the bra
except for those whose favourite book
is the one with Daddy's cheques,
these adopt the latest fashions
with which to display their sex.
Pity the middle-aged professor
who's trying hard to keep alert,
for the girl rapidly taking notes
is wobbling behind her shirt
while Daddy's Girl in the front row
as if at a party surrounded by guests
gives him her undivided attention
and a view of her divided breasts.

Zulfikar Ghose

Valencia

Valencia: our poet in polychrome;
Blue fountains turn him green. WHEN IN ROME. . .
That means do nothing, curse the cockroaches,
The heat, the noise, the tram as it approaches
The Plaza del Claudillio, a Sloane
Square without the breasts; intervallic moan:

Our poet turns yellow, goes to buy a stamp;
The buildings are tall & white, give him cramp
To look at them POETE ANGLAIS in polychrome
Snaps the black sky; a thousand miles from home
Curses his fate in the electric air,
Curses the language; songs of Baudelaire
Under his arm; under his arm a tome
Of Baudelaire, he walks through doors of chrome.

Gordon H. Dyson

FILM

Who Whom?

By John Weightman

AS I WRITE, *Performance* has not yet been shown in France where—if it doesn't appear too obvious—I should expect it to go like a bomb, because it depends on philosophical notions and artistic reminiscences which seem to be more specifically present in Paris than elsewhere, although they are also fashionable all over Western Europe and America. So, perhaps I can comment on it as a French observer might do. I know nothing about Donald Cammel and Nicholas Roeg, the two people responsible for the film. Have they made a special study of Sartre, Genet, Cocteau and all the romantic agony that has fed the American Underground, or have they just absorbed these influences from the surrounding atmosphere? I haven't even got the usual hand-out to guide me, because I was turned away from the press show, where the seats were reserved for the serious professional critics of the daily and weekly papers. I had to pay to see the film two days later at the Warner Theatre in Leicester Square; but I must admit that this calamity had its instructive side. As we walked along from Piccadilly Circus in the early afternoon, the coach-trade was alighting for *Ryan's Daughter* at the Empire, a few doors away. Comfortable, middle-aged Irish mothers were clambering out with bright looks of anticipation. When we left the Warner just after four, there was an immense queue for *Performance*, consisting almost entirely of the young, the deliberately scruffy and the visibly alienated; the word had got around. Two worlds were juxtaposed on the pavement as in the cinema.

Ryan's Daughter is one of the "squarest" films I have seen for many a day, slow and excruciating, and the surest proof, alas, that genius is not a matter of taking pains. It is a great big *machine*, full of landscape and weather, that is, of vast quantities of *En-soi* (Being-in-itself) working overtime as the pathetic fallacy. *Performance* is "advanced", elliptical, perverse and interesting. I wouldn't go so far as to say that it is definitely good;

there are lots of striking details, but the whole thing really adds up, I suppose, to just another good bad film. Part of the difficulty, of course, is that nowadays the concept of the aesthetically good is almost as embarrassing as that of the morally good. A work must be flashy; it must give the impression of having been thrown hurriedly and brilliantly together, so that one skips from effect to effect with no thought of any ultimate principle or message, because principles and messages have become impossibly tedious. Mr David Lean's film is an ultra-conscientious exercise in an outmoded fashion; *Performance* is an apt exercise in a current fashion; but they may appear equally one-sided in five or ten years' time.

THE MAIN IDEA behind *Performance* is the question of identity, and this in turn stems from the Existentialist analysis of consciousness. To the question: "Who am I?" the Existentialist answer is: in essence, no one, an anonymous, polyvalent *Pour-soi* (Being-for-itself), which chooses a role or roles that it tries to play. All of us are performers, all the world's a stage or show business; we are each trying to coincide with the identity we should like to have, but the effort is doomed to failure because there is no way of stabilising oneself in a role or of really seeing oneself fully in the part. However, the benighted may achieve pseudo-identification with Being through congealment in bad faith; they think they *are* the roles they play, and this reduces them from the status of *Pour-soi* almost to the level of mindless *En-soi*.

Performance brings together two exceptional marginal individuals of different kinds, a thug or strong-arm man, Chas (James Fox), who is living his role intensely, and an ex-pop idol, Turner (Mick Jagger), whose main identity appears to have collapsed and who has retreated to the seclusion of his cluttered home, where he plays personality games with robes and make-up. One is extrovert, the other introvert. But, despite appearances, the more neurotic of the two is the former, the handsome sadist, who is acting a comedy of virility and self-assertion. We see him first in the regulation whirl of arms and legs (cf. *Hiroshima mon amour*), and then dressing immaculately to go out and beat up the designated victims of the protection gang he works for (*This Gun for Hire?*). The implication is, however—if I understood the dialogue correctly—that he is overplaying because of a homosexual flaw in his past. He is exaggerated subject turning other people into objects, no doubt because (according to Sartre) the basis of sexuality is

not hormones but the subject/object tension. The sadistic bully is trying to coincide with his virile being by turning all relationships into rape, real or symbolic. He doesn't see that he himself is female with regard to the leader of the protection gang, who is using him as an instrument. (Incidentally, whether the effect is intentional or not, the gang appear as relatively clever Jews exploiting an obtuse Anglo-Saxon.) The break comes when Chas displays too great a keenness to beat-up a young man who was once his particular "friend", thus mixing business with a personal thirst for virile rehabilitation. The friend is brought into the gang and given the job of beating him up to teach him a lesson, but in the resulting fight is shot dead by Chas, who is then forced to go on the run and so meets up with Turner.

In all this first part, in which James Fox gives a marvellous rendering of the healthy-looking, lower-class neurotic, the violence is sexual and aesthetic (cf. *Zabriskie Point*). The camera zooms in and out with a kind of erotic pulsation, blood spatters on to walls as if it were colour thrown by an action painter, and the sadism is marked by grotesque humour. For instance, to intimidate a lawyer, the gang ambush his dapper chauffeur, shave the man's head bare except for a top-knot, and leave him tied in a half-kneeling position at the front of the Rolls-Royce, which has been liberally basted with acid. There is something appropriate about presenting a chauffeur as a coolie/slave about to pull the desecrated status-symbol as if it were a rickshaw. This can be taken as a sort of zany comment by the criminals, who live all the time in a harsh world where the subject/object struggle is obvious, on the partly concealed pressures of legitimate society.

Another notable scene uses the hackneyed sexual, subject/object symbolism of the gun in a rather new way. Chas is beaten up by his ex-friend and two other men, who strip him to his under-pants and flog him with a dog-whip in order to get him to admit something, presumably that he is a pouf. He is thus being reduced to the level of totally humiliated object. At the last moment, just when he is about to yield, he wrenches himself free, knocks over the two men and is able to train his gun on the ex-friend. But he is in such a battered state that he has to hold the gun with two hands, that is, the gun is in front of him, in line with the centre of his almost naked body. For several seconds, and with a sexual grin, he savours the pleasure of the situation, before firing the shot which will turn the ex-friend into object and himself into orgasmic subject. This struck me as a very erotic episode, and much more sophisticated

than the usual indiscriminate use of violence or nakedness in films. It is enhanced by the ironic contrast with an extract from a blue movie glimpsed a little earlier, which is a comically mechanical and inefficient flagellation scene.

UP TO THE POINT at which Chas takes refuge as a lodger in Turner's house, the film seems to be pure amoral entertainment. After that, a slightly more pretentious note creeps in, as if we were meant to take the characters seriously, although it is not really possible to do so.

A certain Structuralist patterning emerges. Chas is tall, fair, and short-haired; Turner is small, dark, and long-haired. Chas has been bludgeoned people physically; Turner has bludgeoned the public artistically (there is an old poster on the wall, which shows him writhing in a dervish-like Jagger attitude). Chas has the appearance of being all male; Turner is almost more convincing when made up to look like a woman. The distance between them is mediated by two other inhabitants of the house, a strong, blonde girl with a Lesbian aura and a dark androgyne with the head of a boy and the incipient breasts of a girl. Thus, if we imagine all four in bed together, the range is covered from masculine to feminine, although no "real" man or "real" woman is present. But, according to the philosophy behind all this, identity being as uncertain as it is, there is no such thing as "real" psychological gender; the blonde girl says as much to Chas as she holds up a mirror to reflect one of her breasts against his chest, as if it were his.

The house is womb, tomb, refuge and temple of aesthetic remembrance. It is like the interiors in some American Underground films, which are both draped and padded harems for nameless orgies, and symbols of dream-stuffed minds. It is presented as being in Notting Hill Gate, but it gets there by way of Baudelaire (*Mon enfant, ma soeur. . . Des divans profonds comme des tombeaux. . . Tes pieds s'endormaient dans mes mains fraternelles. . .*), Huysmans' *A Rebours* and Cocteau's *Les Enfants terribles*, not to mention Poe, Mallarmé, Rimbaud and the early Sartre. Turner lives behind drawn curtains, in a subjective/objective fantasy, helped by drugs, mirrors, wigs, make-up, cameras and tape-recorders, that is, all those pieces of apparatus which allow the consciousness to play games with itself and to switch identities at will. Money is irrelevant (presumably Turner made a fortune as a pop-star), and so when the three inmates are in the bath together like innocently perverted children, they can stick five-pound notes to each other's wet

buttocks, in an unspoken reference to *la déri-sion capitaliste*. They appear to copulate with each other indifferently. They grow their own mescaline mushrooms in the conservatory. They have a remarkable kitchen, which is like Fortnum & Mason's gone mad. They are looked after by an invisible housekeeper (the ideal kind), with a mustachioed little boy-monster who might have wandered in from *Zéro de conduite*.

HAVING FOUND HIS WAY into this pleasure-dome, Chas is at first dumbfounded and then he is gradually initiated. We seem to be meant to understand that he finds relief from the strain of his previous role by surrendering to all the overlapping ambiguities. This is plausible enough; it is less comprehensible that Turner should want to identify with him because, after all, he is not genuine natural brute at the opposite pole from Turner's effete anti-naturalism. He is a sort of phoney, whereas Turner is sincere in his decadence. Either the film is muddled, or I failed to understand, since the reciprocity which is established between them does not seem to be sufficiently motivated. It is sometimes impossible to tell, in the imaginative sequences of this second part, whether we are in Chas's mind when he is thinking of himself as Turner, or in Turner's mind when he is dreaming of being Chas. I suspect that the makers of the film have given way to the facile, Robbe-Grillet-like assumption that if you can bamboozle the audience with an appearance of pregnant mystery, it doesn't matter much whether the pregnancy is true or false. The initial sparring between Chas and Turner is all right, but I cannot see why they should be shown embracing as lovers, without any preparation, or why their faces should be interchangeable in certain scenes. Turner, as a thorough-going decadent, is made to say that all genuine experience leads to madness, or Rimbaudian words to that effect, but whether this is true or not, it is obvious that art cannot be based on random madness. And the double death wish by which the film is brought

to an end—Chas is discovered by the gang and, before they lead him off to execution, he does Turner the favour of shooting him dead, no doubt to allow the anguished emptiness of his role-playing *Pour-soi* to achieve the ultimate calm of non-existence—is a rather meretricious device, although one might argue, if one wanted to be ingenious, that whereas Chas's first murder was under the sign of *eros*, the second is an expression of *agape*. However, even if we are meant to think this, the point is stuck on from outside rather than developed from within.

I don't feel, then, that the second part coalesces properly, which is a pity, because it was a bright, if decadent, idea to make the criminal pass from the underworld of illegality and crime to re-education for death in the different underworld of drugs, wigs, and multisex, without ever living at all in the average world. Perhaps the philosophy is inadequate; in spite of everything that Sartre says, I am not persuaded that the subject/object tension is a total explanation of behaviour, nor that identities are as fluctuating as all that, nor that male and female are so easily interchangeable. But if one can overlook one's intellectual reservations, there are some curious sequences. The main one is a drug-induced dream in which Chas (I think) sees Turner as the leader of his former gang. The original leader was a plump, falsely amiable Cockney Jew; Turner appears as a lean, Chicago-gangster type with sleeked-back hair, singing a satanic song (the words of which unfortunately remained incomprehensible to me) as he bullies his henchmen into some sort of naked orgy, which ends with their unlovely bodies in a Francis Bacon, pink-and-blue tangle on the floor. It seemed to me that Turner's "performance" was translating the truth of the power-relationship within the gang into a kind of rhythmic, sexual nightmare. Mick Jagger was convincingly baleful throughout this whole episode. Perhaps he has a natural gift for sadistic frenzy and it is time someone thought of making the first horror musical with him at the centre.

NOTES & TOPICS

Solzhenitsyn & Lukacs

By Martin Esslin

THE AWARD of the Nobel Prize for literature to Alexander Solzhenitsyn has once more highlighted the vexed problem of writers in the Soviet Union. Solzhenitsyn has been denounced by the authorities responsible for controlling literature in Soviet Russia as deviating from the officially approved principles which govern the work of writers of fiction. But the case is not as simple as that. The acknowledged world authority on Marxism and literature, Georg Lukacs, has in fact come forward as a champion of Solzhenitsyn's attitude. I think that an examination of the background to the controversy throws light on to the basic issues not only of socialist realism but the whole question of the writer's position in a totalitarian society.

In the period before the Bolshevik victory in the October revolution Leftist views in politics and an avant-garde attitude in the arts were practically synonymous. If one wanted to "change society" it was also logical that one should want to break with the established principles of aesthetics. And so the victory of the Bolsheviks in 1917 ushered in a veritable orgy of avant-garde art: abstract painting; constructivism; futurism in painting and sculpture; formalism and expressionism in poetry; the bio-mechanics of Meyerhold and the unleashed theatre of Tairov on the stage. These and other movements dominated the scene in Soviet Russia and exercised an immense influence on the European avant-garde in the 1920s. Particularly in Germany these avant-garde movements were associated with left-wing politics, so much so that right-wing circles talked of the avant-garde as of "Cultural Bolsheviks" (*Kulturbolschewisten*).

But with the rise of Stalin and the consolidation of Soviet power into a bureaucratic dictatorship the views of the Soviet authorities on art underwent a radical change. The avant-gardists in the arts were by their very nature inveterate experimenters. They wanted to try out every possible approach and this conflicted

with the hardening orthodoxy of the official ideology. But even more important was the need to harness the arts for the "ideological education of the masses"—or to put it in somewhat blunter terms, to make the artists serve the propaganda purposes of the régime. High-brow experimental art could not by its very nature be popular and was therefore doomed to be ineffective as propaganda, whereas excessive truthfulness in the description of the realities of life in this very difficult period, even when couched in realistic and easily comprehensible terms, was bound to be downright harmful for the régime which did not relish the idea of having food shortages or injustices advertised in novels or plays. At the first all-Union Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934 one of Stalin's closest collaborators, Andrey Zhdanov, laid down the lines which writers would have to follow from now on:

Comrade Stalin has called our writers "engineers of the human soul." What does this mean? What obligations does such an appellation put upon you? It means in the first place that you must know life to be able to depict it truthfully in artistic creations, to depict it neither "scholastically" nor lifelessly, nor simply as "objective reality" but rather as reality in its revolutionary development. The truthfulness and historical exactitude of the artistic image must be linked with the task of ideological formation, of the education of the working people in the spirit of socialism. This method in fiction and literary criticism we call the method of socialist realism.

"Objective reality" was here decisively rejected. Instead Zhdanov appealed for what he called a "revolutionary romanticism":

Soviet literature must be able to portray our heroes and to see our tomorrow. This will not be Utopian since our tomorrow is being prepared by planned and conscious work today.

In other words instead of depicting the objective reality of what life *was* like at the time, Zhdanov suggested that writers should describe what life *ought* to have looked like. The phrase "revolutionary romanticism" implies a heightening of colours, an injection of optimism. At the same time all "*non-realistic art*"—either abstract art or the exploration of individual problems in the form of dreams, allegories or soul-searchings was rejected as formalistic, a-political and morbidly individualistic.

TO MANY OF THE STAUNCHEST supporters of Communism among the artists who had also been leaders of the artistic avant-garde these decisions came as a profound shock. The leader of the Russian avant-garde poets, Vladimir Maiakovsky, committed suicide in

1930 when the first indications of this development made themselves felt. Among German writers Zhdanov's pronouncement caused embarrassment to men like Brecht who had always combined Communist aims with avant-gardistic forms. The demand that all literature must be *realist* and the insistence of the authorities that writers like Balzac or Gorky should serve as models seemed to them to invalidate much of their previous work and to stop them from continuing to write in their own style.

THE DEBATE ON THIS SUBJECT was conducted in a number of periodicals of which the German-language monthly *Das Wort* (The Word) which was published in Moscow and of which Brecht was one of the three co-editors played a very important part. Various German writers argued that Expressionism—the very antithesis of realism—and even Surrealism could be revolutionary and socialist. After all the great German Expressionists had been Communists, and so had the French Surrealists. In this debate the defence of socialist realism was taken up by the most brilliant and influential of all Communist aestheticians, the Hungarian philosopher Georg Lukacs. He argued the case with his customary force:

The modern literary movements of the imperialist period from naturalism to surrealism, which have been following each other in rapid succession, resemble each other in that they all take reality as it immediately appears to the writer and his characters. These immediate appearances change as social development changes, both objectively and subjectively, according to the changes in the objective phenomena of capitalist reality and according to the way in which class changes and class struggles produce differing formations of the surface of society. But all these remain fixed in this immediacy both in thought and in emotion: they do not delve for the essence which is the real connection between the experience of the author and the real life of society for the hidden causes which objectively produce these forms and the links which connect these individual experiences with the objective reality of society.

The opposition between all these modern tendencies and the tradition of literature culminates in a passionate protest against the arrogance of critics who allegedly try to stop them from

writing as the spirit moves them to write. The representatives of all these different movements do not notice the fact that real freedom, the freedom from the reactionary prejudices of the Imperialist period, can never be reached on the basis of spontaneity and the continued insistence on immediacy.

No wonder that the Left-wing avant-gardists were dismayed. Here Lukacs seemed to be arguing exactly the same way as Zhdanov, albeit on a far more lofty intellectual plane. Brecht quarrelled with the idea that, to be realist, literature had to follow traditional forms and to be easily understood.

Whether a work is realist or not cannot be seen merely from having a look whether it is similar or not to existing works that are called realist and were realist in their own epoch. In each case the description of life must be compared not with other descriptions of life but with life itself. A work is comprehensible not merely because it is written exactly like the other works before them. Something had to be done to *make* them comprehensible. So we, too, must do something to make new works comprehensible. It is not a question merely of what *is* popular but of what can *be made* popular.

It is characteristic that, although Brecht wrote these words, he did not publish them at the time. The German critic Walter Benjamin has recorded a conversation with Brecht in Denmark (on 29 July 1938) in which these matters were discussed:

Brecht read me several polemical writings against Lukacs, sketches for an essay which is to be published in *Das Wort*. They are camouflaged but violent attacks. Brecht asks me for my advice about publishing them. As at the same time he tells me that Lukacs at the moment has a very big position over there, I tell him that I am unable to advise. "This is a question of positions of power. You ought to ask somebody over there for his opinion." Whereupon Brecht: "Strictly speaking I have no friends there. And the people in Moscow themselves don't have any either—as if they were dead..."

This suggests how depressed avant-gardists like Brecht were about the concept of socialist realism and the use made of it by the Stalinist terror, and how they regarded Lukacs as the spokesman for the official line.¹

That was more than thirty years ago. Much has changed since then, but much has also remained the same.

GEORG LUKACS returned to Hungary from the Soviet Union after the War. He sided with the reformers in 1956 and briefly held office as a minister in the Imre Nagy government. After the Russians re-occupied Budapest he was for a time under arrest.²

¹ For a sharp critique of Lukacs as an "official spokesman," see George Lichtheim's essay in *ENCOUNTER*, May 1963.

² See the account by François Bondy and Hans Mayer, "The Struggle for Kafka and Joyce," in *ENCOUNTER*, May 1964.

Since his release he has continued to live in Budapest, but also publishes some of his works in West Germany. When I visited him in Budapest three years ago Lukacs assured me that he had been misunderstood in the '30s. When he talked about realism he had merely voiced his opinion that writers like Walter Scott, Thomas Mann, Balzac or Tolstoy were greater than avant-gardists like Joyce or Beckett. But this had not meant that he was advocating cheap optimistic propaganda of the kind Zhdanov had proposed.

In 1964, in fact, Lukacs had for the first time revealed the sources of this misunderstanding—which unkind observers might have interpreted as a deliberate blurring of the issue in Stalin's time. He did this in an essay on Alexander Solzhenitsyn's novel, *A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, the only major work which Solzhenitsyn was able to publish in the Soviet Union. (This was during the period when Khrushchev relaxed certain controls over literature.) Lukacs welcomed Solzhenitsyn as a portent of a truly socialist realist style. He explained why he felt this, although some critics had regarded the book, which describes a day in a labour camp, as a work of symbolism—the labour camp standing for the Soviet Union as a whole.

Readers thought that this one day in the life of Ivan Denisovich was a symbol for the Stalin period. Yet in Solzhenitsyn's style of telling the story there is no trace of symbolism. He gives a true slice of life, exactly corresponding to reality, in which no single feature comes to the fore, to get a specially stressed—an exaggerated—significance so as to achieve a symbolic effect. On the other hand, it is true that in this slice of life the typical destiny and the typical behaviour of millions of people has been preserved in concentrated form.

And then Lukacs drew the distinction between what he had meant when talking about socialist realism in the 1930s and what the authorities had meant when *they* had advocated socialist realism.

In the "illustrative literature" of the Stalin period a bureaucratic naturalism which was combined with an equally bureaucratic so-called "revolutionary romanticism" took the place of realism. In abstract theorising, it is true, naturalism and realism were put into opposition to each other. But only in the abstract. And this abstraction could only be shown up in concrete form by opposition to this kind of "illustrative literature."

This is a very obscure way of putting it but Lukacs's meaning is quite clear; what he is saying is that although the bureaucratically prescribed literature of the Stalin era was a mixture

of what he calls naturalism and romanticism, it could not be attacked under that name in Zhdanov's time and that therefore the only way you could attack it was to call it a form of literature which did not spring from genuine experience but was merely there to illustrate abstract political ideas. As Lukacs goes on to explain:

In practice the official manipulation of literature denounced every fact mentioned in the work which did not correspond to official directives—and only such facts—as naturalism. According to this practice a work would transcend naturalism only if the writer chose to describe only such facts which directly or indirectly justified the Party decisions to illustrate which the work in question was to be written. The selection of typical characters and incidents was thus reduced to a purely political device. Quite independently from the dialectic of the characters themselves, their essence as human beings, they were treated as types to provide a positive or negative judgment on ways of behaviour according to whether these ways of behaviour helped or hindered the execution of the Party decisions in question. This led to extremes of mechanical contrivance of plot and character, which however cannot but be described as naturalistic, in so far as these details were not organically connected among each other nor with the characters involved nor with their fate. They remained pale, abstract, or over-explicit according to the nature of the writer concerned but never coalesced into an organic unity with the material which was being treated, as they had been brought together by purely external considerations. I should like to remind readers of the scholastic debates that took place, whether, in what way and how far a positive hero should have been allowed also to have negative qualities. Behind such debates there stood the denial of the fact that in literature the concrete individual human being is the most important consideration, the starting and finishing point of the creative process. There human beings and their fate were to be manipulated in an arbitrary way.

Here we are at the core of the misunderstanding, whether it was a deliberately engineered one or not. The avant-gardist writers had taken Lukacs' advocacy of socialist realism to be in support of socialist realism as the bureaucrats understood it. When he praised the way in which Walter Scott, Balzac, Tolstoy or Thomas Mann had selected the typical features of their society and formed them into a total picture (which was realistic in the sense that it contained all essential features but escaped the objection of naturalism because these writers concentrated on essentials and did not over-indulge their own individual emotions), the champions of avant-garde literature had believed that he was in fact recommending that writers should portray Soviet reality as it ought

to have been rather than as it really was and that they should follow the Party directives.

Twenty-five years later Lukacs' reply was that he had thought as ill of this literature as they. And that the best work of socialist realism to be produced in the Soviet Union was in fact Solzhenitsyn's highly critical account of the Stalinist terror.

Lukacs concluded his essay of 1964 with the question whether Solzhenitsyn would develop into the great novelist of socialist realism. Six years later, in 1970, he revealed his answer in a second essay on Solzhenitsyn, published together with the first in a small book which appeared under the auspices of a West German publisher.³ It must be remembered that Lukacs is still living in Budapest, in a country therefore where as in the Soviet Union, Solzhenitsyn's two famous novels, *The First Circle* and *Cancer Ward*, officially do not exist, and could in fact not even have been read by a loyal citizen. But then Lukacs at the age of eighty-five, and the acknowledged grand old man of Marxist philosophy, no longer fears the Party's disapproval. The second essay, which is dated September 1969, opens with the words:

In spite of my considered acknowledgement that Solzhenitsyn's stories constituted an important step forward in the renewal of the great tradition of the socialist realism of the 1920s, at that time I cautiously left the question open whether he himself would achieve the rebirth of socialist realism and its rise to world significance. I can now state with pleasure that I was far too cautious: the two novels which have now appeared constitute a new high point in contemporary world literature.

This second essay on Solzhenitsyn's novels is a long and fascinating chain of arguments. Lukacs starts by linking Solzhenitsyn and his technique with Thomas Mann and in particular with Mann's novel *The Magic Mountain*. To give a picture of the total social reality of the period, Lukacs says, Mann invented the brilliant device of finding a way in which a really large representative cross-section of society could be brought together in one place: in this case the sanatorium for consumptives in the Swiss Alps. This device, Lukacs argues, enables a writer to establish relations between characters who otherwise would be unlikely to meet and thus to fulfil the postulate of genuine realistic literature: that it should represent the whole

of social reality by concentrating on the typical features of the social scene. Solzhenitsyn, whether consciously or unconsciously, says Lukacs, has hit on the same device. In *A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* Solzhenitsyn had already chosen such a cross-section of society—analogueous to the sanatorium in *The Magic Mountain*—namely the labour camp. But he had concentrated only on the inmates of the camp and thus left the totality of the society out of the picture. Referring to *The First Circle* Lukacs says:

Solzhenitsyn's development of this technique from his first story not only, of necessity, increases the number of prisoners whose life is shown . . . it also demands that the initiators and organisers of this internment of large masses of people must also be depicted on a wider basis and more concretely. . . . Only thus does the "place of action" receive its concrete socially determined general significance. . . . In the last resort it is a social fact that the internment camp confronts both its victims and its organisers spontaneously and irresistibly with its provocative basic questions. . . . Solzhenitsyn's method of composition now aims at raising the drama of the interaction between the questions with which both of these groups, who are both totally inter-related and totally opposed to each other, are faced, to the maximum. For this reason the place of internment is no longer, as in the earlier story, an average one. And the author further underlines his purpose in choosing a day which is a relatively favourable one in that it does not culminate in a tragic event, and that the institution concerned is a place where privileged specialists are working on secret inventions which the system regards as important.

By concentrating not only on the internees but also on their guards and the free scientists and assistants who share their work, Solzhenitsyn (so runs Lukacs' argument) is enabled to bring the whole of Soviet society into the focus of his work. The whole of the structure of the society is thus seen as being closely interrelated:

This connection springs from the monolithic character of the Party apparatus. Solzhenitsyn here penetrates to its ultimate principle by showing us how the hierarchy reaches from people who have a merely chance connection, even a totally passive one, with this apparatus, up the ladder straight to Stalin himself. As in the classical historical novel of Walter Scott this central figure only appears in one episode.

This is not the place to reproduce Lukacs' brilliant analysis of Solzhenitsyn's two great novels—an analysis which, as can be seen from the above example, links him with the great tradition of the historical novel, the novel as a method of social analysis in the sense in which Balzac wrote his *Comédie Humaine* and Tolstoy *War and Peace*. The relationship be-

³ *Solzhenitsyn*. By GEORG LUKACS. Luchterhand Verlag; just published in Britain by the Merlin Press.

tween *Cancer Ward* and *The Magic Mountain* does not have to be underlined.

From the point of view of the development of the novel both of Solzhenitsyn's works show the extraordinary creative fertility of the new method, the beginning of which dates from *The Magic Mountain*.

Here we can see directly how people react to the social situation, how their personal life is endowed with the maximum of spiritual and moral self-awareness under the influence of the prevailing social system. Artistically it is no diminishing factor that in the description of the bureaucratic humanity of that society, which in fact reduces people to ciphers, the characters themselves occasionally appear as somewhat schematic literary creations. . . . What is important about it all is that the central structure of the inner contradictions of the society becomes apparent. . . . And that this is the best method to make a society aware of its own shifting, many-sided, internal and external complexity—and to make others outside the society aware of it.

LUKACS ENDS HIS ESSAY by posing the question of the political significance of Solzhenitsyn's

novels. For a variety of complex reasons he places them into a "plebeian" rather than a strictly Communist tradition. If one remembers that most of his other heroes, whom he regards as the greatest masters of the realist novel, from Walter Scott to Tolstoy, could never claim the adjective Communist either, this cannot be considered a very damaging criticism.

The paradox remains, and it is a highly significant one, that the greatest Marxist literary critic of our time regards as the culmination of the socialist realist novel the works of a writer who has been expelled from the Union of Soviet Writers; and considers as the greatest novels of our time two books which the inhabitants of the Soviet Union and the other countries under its domination are not even allowed to read. There could be no better illustration of the deep inner contradictions of the society and the ideology of which Solzhenitsyn's novels give, in Lukacs' opinion, so masterly a picture.

Revolution—or Reform?

A Conversation between OTA SIK and RAYMOND ARON

RAYMOND ARON: I'm not opposed in principle to *socialisme de marché*, to "market-socialism." I simply feel that it's a rather abstract concept. For sociological if not for economic reasons a socialist system based on a market economy is difficult to put into practice. Socialism has hitherto always been understood to mean a single party operating a policy of authoritarian planning. I have made my choice in terms of the real alternatives, socialism and capitalism as they actually exist. I was not opposed when I was young—nor am I now—to a form of socialism which, while collectivising the means of production, would at the same time pre-

serve the political liberties and advantages of a free market.

OTA SIK: I must say at once that I am at a disadvantage in this debate. I am defending ideas which so far are only theories. I cannot argue from first-hand experience of a democratic socialist society except in so far as this applies to the very brief period, only a few months, of what we called the Prague Springtime. We had no time to put our ideas fully into practice.

But I don't think we can confine the argument within the fixed terms of socialism as it is and capitalism as it is. My method, in line with the dialectic, has always been the objective study of contradictions within the existing systems. I must emphasise this. I am not a Utopian and I don't favour the elaboration of certain model systems in the quest for a more equitable order of society. To my mind that is not the right way of going about it. As I see it, there are contradictory evolutionary tendencies in both capitalist society and Soviet-type socialist society. These contradictions are my starting point. Proceeding from them, by the use of the dialectical method, I have arrived

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This conversation was conducted and recorded by Roger Priouret, an editor of "L'Expansion".

at certain possible answers and have come to believe in the idea of democratic socialism.

ARON: M. Sik is in fact in a doubly unfavourable position. In the first place, as I have said and as he agrees, the kind of socialism he has in mind does not exist anywhere as yet. And secondly—this is a more subtle complication—he does not permit himself to invent an ideal system that would satisfy him. That is why I would like to divide our discussion into three stages.

During the first stage I would like to be listener and questioner. I want to know how it is that, through his experience of Eastern régimes, he has reached conclusions which, broadly speaking, correspond to my own beliefs. Secondly I want to prove to him, if I can, that the democratic socialism he envisages will be sociologically extremely difficult to achieve because of the probable incompatibility of the elements he seeks to unite. And, finally, I would like us to attempt a joint analysis of the contradictions peculiar to each system, and to try, within the dialectic of each system and of each system in relation to the other, to sketch out a possible line of progress.

SIK: Very well. I will try to explain briefly what has brought me to the idea of a socialist market-economy. But economics and politics cannot be kept in separate compartments. In my view, a socialist market-economy is not feasible except within a framework of human, democratic socialism. At the present stage of human evolution a market-economy seems to me necessary and irreplaceable for two reasons.

First, nowadays no central organism, however far-reaching its powers, is capable of ordering the productive process in detail so as to enable it to fulfil all requirements and expand efficiently.

Secondly, still in terms of human evolution, the clash of interests between man as a producer and man as a consumer seems to me a basic fact which has to be accepted. Hence the need to preserve the open market, which is the least harmful way of adjusting production to requirements and reconciling the contradictions.

ARON: Let me put in a word here. It has been estimated that in Russia the economy produces 40,000 different articles. But the economists themselves reckon that only 10,000 of these come within the scope of planning.

SIK: Forty thousand? You're nowhere near it, or at least the Soviet economists aren't. We reckoned roughly that in a highly industria-

lised country like Czechoslovakia there were 1,500,000 specific items to be taken into account. And we also reckoned that the central planning system, during the years when centralisation reached its peak, had only been able to include between 1,000 and 1,200 categories or articles in its plans.

Central planning can only work on broad lines—in aggregates, to use the right word. And the breakdown of these aggregates has to be done within the different sectors of industry. In that sense I entirely agree with M. Aron. No central body can replace the separate managements that any branch of industry requires.

But that is not all. The central planning system works on the assumption that men will always arrive at the best possible decisions, making the fullest use of available resources. This notion is contradicted by the facts. The centre cannot exploit the resources of the economy it controls to the fullest possible extent, for the very good reason that it lacks the necessary information. And we must bear in mind that men are fallible. In any central planning body you get small interested groups which in one way or another become predominant, just as you do in a capitalist system (in heavy industry, for example). And it is the interests of the producers which come first; wider interests are disregarded. Production aims at achieving the highest possible level of wages and rewards, so it produces only for the benefit of the specific industry, and very often to the detriment of the general consumer.

ARON: There you touch on the objection which the old-style liberals—and I have ended by becoming one—have always raised against socialism, including a Leninist socialism.

Socialists have always assumed that once a party representing the proletariat was installed in power it would have no other aim than the optimisation of economic, technological, and human progress. In short, socialism promises a transformation in human nature, at least among the people in charge of affairs. The liberals thought, and we still do, that human nature cannot be changed overnight, and that the representatives of the proletariat, having achieved power, would still retain their particular interests and pursue them. What strikes me about your indictment of authoritarian planning is that you are repeating two of the arguments used by liberals against socialism—the difficulty of a centralised management of the economy and the difficulty of eliminating private interests.

SIK: The fact that we both bow to the evidence in this respect does not mean that I agree with all your views.

ARON: I would not expect you to!

SIK: What it comes to is that there are contradictions in a socialist economy which, although they are different from those under capitalism, are no less real. I have mentioned one in particular because it is obvious to everyone—the conflict between producer and consumer. The only way of getting over that is the free market, which prevents the producer from arbitrarily asserting his interests over those of the consumer. It is quite clear that under bureaucratic socialism of the Soviet type the producers have consistently ignored the interests of the consumers and are still doing so.

But the clash of interests between producer and consumer is not the only anomaly. There is another fundamental contradiction which causes me to stick to the basic idea of socialism. This is the contradiction between the interests of capital and those of the people who are simply wage-earners, and it is peculiar to the capitalist system which you are defending. I would call it an unnecessary contradiction. It seems to me quite insufficient, for the development of any society, that the management and best use of capital, which is one of the prime movers of economic and social progress, should be in the hands of a small group of people, while the great mass, interested only in the pay-pocket, remain unconcerned with what is done with it.

Let me put it more exactly. Capital is the instrument of production. It should therefore be at the service of everyone, and everyone should have an interest in safeguarding and preserving it. Instead of which, under the capitalist system it is safeguarded and preserved by only a handful of men. This puts a brake on growth and prevents the expansion of society and of the economy.

ARON: But you are using two arguments at once. There is the strictly economic argument, which seems to me rather weak—namely, that the wage-earners do not get a normal share of the total wealth created by the development of new means of production. And there is a second, more recent argument, which maintains, as you have just done, that everyone is concerned with capital—that is to say, capital equipment—and that it is wrong that a mere handful of men should be in control of what is common property.

SIK: I'm not talking about the absolute impoverishment of the working class. All that

belongs to the last century and no longer applies. I realise, of course, that in the Western world it is not only the owners of capital who are interested in capital. There is also the managerial class, but they too are a minority. I'm simply saying that it is wrong that anything as important as the use of capital, with its profound effect on the development of industry and the whole process of production, should be in the hands of a minority.

But is nationalisation the answer? In my opinion it is useful only in a few exceptional cases. What is important is that the workers should share not only in the proceeds of capital but also in the problems associated with it—investment policy, among others. I can't go into detail here, and I realise that there are a great many theoretical and social problems still to be solved. But in spite of this we have developed a number of basic ideas.

ARON: I understand your difficulty, and I will merely add that all ways are difficult. That you have not found any complete answer is not due to chance. It may well be that the difficulty is to some extent insurmountable.

SIK: In any case the degree of nationalisation applied in the Eastern countries has done nothing to lessen the contradiction between the interests of capital and those of the wage-earners. On the contrary, I think it has deepened it. Under the Soviet system, apart from the small group of managers and bureaucrats in the planning-offices, the people on the pay-roll have no interest in capital and production developments. For the mass of workers, industrial progress is something that is quite remote from them.

So where do we look for a remedy? Unquestionably along the lines of collective ownership and self-administration.

ARON: What you say about socialism was already said by Max Weber. To him nationalisation meant bureaucracy leading to the further alienation of the wage-earner. You talk of collective ownership and *autogestion*. But all that is singularly vague. One has to ask oneself how far that kind of ideal organisation is compatible with rationalised and technically efficient management.

SIK: I must point out that people in the West have a totally wrong idea of what we mean when we talk about auto-administration. They think we mean a wage-earners' collective which will take over the management and administration of a business.

ARON: That's not what I think.

SIK: Our scheme of reforms, in the Prague Springtime, was based on two principles. The first was that the workers and staff should really feel themselves to be democratically represented by the collective, and secondly that the people composing the collective should be in a position to pass judgment but should not take over the functions of management. You can see what the intention was—to give the workers or their representatives power to control, nominate, and dismiss managers. It followed that these collectives had to be composed of qualified and competent persons.

What happened, during the few months of the Prague Springtime, was remarkable. In the freest elections ever held in our country the workers themselves elected councils of so high a standard that nothing like it had been seen before. They even elected members of the scientific intelligentsia. They did this of their own accord and it was very impressive.

ARON: I am sure it was, but you know as well as I do that any Leninist party would reject that kind of procedure. You talk of contradictions. You must not overlook the contradiction between an all-powerful Party, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the free election of any kind of governing body.

SIK: You're quite right, but that does not come within the scope of this discussion. I said at the outset that a socialist market-economy was only possible in a context of genuine political democracy. Under the Soviet system it is not the Party as a whole which has the power—because its rank-and-file members have no power of decision. It isn't even the Central Committee. The real power is in the hands of the small group of men comprising the *Politburo*.

ARON: But how on earth did you fail to see that your system would be intolerable to Soviet socialism, which was therefore forced to eliminate you?

SIK: I admit it may look a little naïve.

ARON: Or over-optimistic.

SIK: But you must realise that we had no choice. The Czechoslovak economy was in a shocking state—of course it's even worse now—but we didn't want to go back to capitalism.

ARON: This brings us to the second stage of our discussion. I have been brooding for forty years over the different possible economic and social systems. I assure you I have no particular prejudice in favour of the private

ownership of the means of production, which is the natural wealth of the whole community. Nor am I much concerned with protecting the shareholders in large corporations. My thinking is on quite other lines. If one abolishes the multiplicity of social forces, and even the conflict of interests, what is the sociological basis of democracy?

I come back to things I have been thinking all my life. I have observed that—particularly since the Second World War—the capitalist system has raised the standard of living of 70-80% of the population, and that Revolution, with a capital R, has become more and more improbable. It is the very diversity of interests, the contradictions and, if you like, the “class struggle”, which make a democratic system workable.

It was Montesquieu who said that a necessary condition of the moderate régime, in which liberty can flourish, is competition between relatively independent social forces. So I must put this question to you. Is it not precisely this competition, as it exists under capitalism, which enables democracy to function? Because if you nationalise all the forces of production and seek to eliminate all contradiction between conflicting interests, will there be any social basis for democracy?

SIK: What you say, Professor Aron, will be very gratifying to Marxists who argue on the lines of Soviet orthodoxy. The Marxist-Leninist theory, or, if you prefer, the dogmatic interpretation of Marxism, has disastrously simplified the problem of conflicting interests by simply lumping them together under the heading of “class-conflict”. It works on the assumption that the elimination of contradictions between classes through the nationalisation of the means of production will magically endow all the people of a country with a common interest. That is the fundamental error of Stalinism, which in fact began under Lenin. It was Lenin who believed that the abolition of the private control of capital would make the “dictatorship of the proletariat” the expression of the common and exclusive interest of all men.

This is nothing but a dangerous illusion. Class contradictions have in theory been eliminated in Soviet Russia and in the People's Democracies, since there is no private ownership of industry. But there are still divergencies of interest between different groups and sections of the population, and that is why genuine democracy is essential, so that these differences may show themselves and achieve an equilibrium.

ARON: That is a very significant concession—for you are discarding the whole myth of the Revolution.

SIK: No, really, I firmly believe—and I have already made this clear—that the private ownership of the means of production must be abolished, because this merely creates a further paralysing contradiction.

ARON: Perhaps. But you cannot abolish that particular contradiction except through violent revolution which will bring into power a group of people claiming to represent the collective interests of society. Your general reasoning, which I accept, should lead you to become a Reformist like myself, not a Revolutionary, such as you claim to be. Because if there is to be a multiplicity of interests and separate undertakings in your post-revolutionary State, why afflict that State with the huge cost of a violent revolution?

SIK: You see, I was right to say that mine is a difficult position since I have to fight on two fronts—against the Soviet system on one side, and against the liberal capitalism which you represent on the other.

No, Raymond Aron. I believe that we must bring about a qualitative change in capitalist society. Does that make me “a reformist”? If the reforms are simply a matter of words, then decidedly I am nothing of the kind. And on the other hand, if they are to be genuine reforms, getting rid of both sets of contradictions—those of capitalism and those of bureaucratic socialism—I am not sure that you will go along with me. But I believe that today the popular front of people looking for a new kind of humane, democratic socialism has become so broad that it is capable of enforcing the necessary changes by democratic means.

ARON: Two points, simply. Friedrich Engels, at the end of his life, said pretty much what you have been saying—that he had come to believe in the possibility of the gradual transformation of capitalism into socialism without violent revolution.

And secondly, your notion of “qualitative change” is more a word than an idea. Between capitalism as Marx analysed it, and as it exists today, is the difference quantitative or qualitative? I believe there is a qualitative change. I say this simply because I fear the violence that is a part of all revolution and the bitter disillusionment that will follow if a reviled capitalism is replaced by an odious dictatorship.

May we now go on to the third stage of our

discussion. It can be summed up in three questions.

1. Where do we find the beginnings of a qualitative transformation in the West?
2. What are the equivalent indications in the East?
3. What is the reciprocal effect of these changes on both sides?

SIK: I can see a beginning of humane democratic socialism in the West in the fact that the interests of society as a whole are tending to outweigh the one-sided increase of production for the sake of capital profit.

ARON: I agree.

SIK: Which implies a regulated economy and a larger part played by the State as the representative of the workers.

ARON: That was Keynes's idea.

SIK: But there is more to it than that. When the State clamps down on private interests in order to protect society against excessive, indiscriminate production (the pollution of towns, and so on), when it introduces shorter working hours, better use of leisure, and a higher standard of education, both cultural and technical, then it is acting on behalf of the collective interest, and that is the beginning of Socialism.

Capitalist societies always want to produce more in order to sell more, and to sell more in order to produce more. But at the present time there is a tide flowing in a different direction—in favour of less preoccupation with production and sales, and more concern for the leisure and the well-being of the individual.

The demand for participation, both in profits and in management, causes men of the Left in the Western countries to smile, and for the most part the men of the Right don't believe in it. But in fact that movement is gaining ground, and it is a first step to qualitative change.

I'm less happy about the East. When you have created a monopolistic power-structure favouring a minority in a country which has never had the habit of democracy, and when that structure is sustained by the entire bureaucratic and ideological apparatus which deliberately keeps the people in ignorance—in such a rigorously totalitarian system it is not easy to introduce reforms. But the system has become a cage imprisoning whole nations, and in time they will recover the liberty they can't live without.

Now to your third question: the extent to which East and West interact on each other. Professor Aron, the thing that seems to me blazingly obvious, knowing as I do something of both worlds, is that the gap—that is to say, the extent to which the East is falling behind the West—is increasing at an almost dizzy speed. It is so great and is growing under such conditions, that sooner or later the Soviet-type economies will be forced to make political reforms. But as to when and how, I have no idea.

Now I would like to ask you something. Don't you think that on both sides of the Curtain, in the capitalist and the Soviet countries, there are highly contradictory fundamental forces which are helping each other to preserve their privileged position?

ARON: No, no, it isn't at all as simple as that.

SIK: And in the opposite sense, don't you see on both sides extremely belligerent forces which are coming together to create a better world? I don't say that because it's what I want; I believe such forces exist.

ARON: You must be careful. I believe that very powerful forces exist in both camps for the avoidance of war. I believe that even the fundamentalist elements—both capitalism as you describe it, and Soviet bureaucracy—have a common interest in avoiding a major war, which would destroy everyone. But does that mean that there are equally powerful forces impelling East and West to find a common road? I don't believe it. Western régimes are more flexible and open to new ideas. The people holding power in the East always have the feeling that if they concede anything they may lose everything.

SIK: But you must admit that even in the West there are certain power-elements that retain more influence in times of international tension. The armament industry, for example, and, of course, the whole military bureaucracy.

ARON: That applies particularly to the United States. The "military-industrial complex" is comparatively unimportant in France.

SIK: But you will agree with me that the fundamentalist elements in East and West seem in a singular fashion to bolster each other up?

ARON: Yes, and that is what I'd call the dialectic of hostility.

SIK: And you must also agree that this state of international tension can't go on for ever. To me this is additional evidence that within both systems there are pacific forces which will finally assert themselves.

ARON: I think you're now confusing two phenomena which have to be kept separate. One is the ideological and social opposition of the two systems; the other is rivalry between Great Powers.

Great Power rivalry can exist between States having the same ideology. The Russo-Chinese conflict is a case in point. And it is a fact that at present there is a lessening of the Cold-War tension between the United States and Russia, despite the American intervention in Cambodia and the bureaucratic conservatism of the Russian leaders. And, if you will forgive me for citing a painful example, the West took no official notice of the occupation of Czechoslovakia. But this easing of external tensions has done nothing to bring the régimes closer together in their internal development.

SIK: Nevertheless, Professor Aron, will you not grant that today there exist within both systems forces, which, although they are still comparatively weak, are growing in strength. These forces see the danger of war, and they also see that that danger is always caused by small groups of interests which drag the people after them by nationalist or racist propaganda. Do you think we can go on living eternally in this precarious state?

ARON: Eternally There's no eternity in history.

SIK: Peaceful forces are coming into being which must, sooner or later, think along the same lines as you and I have been doing.

ARON: Must—or should?

SIK: Well, I agree. It's a matter of faith. My belief is that the logic of evolution will lead to the creation of an order of society in which a small group of men can no longer impose its interests on the majority of mankind.

ARON: I wish I could wholly agree with you about that. I'm not saying you're wrong, but I'm less convinced than you are. It is perhaps simply that you believe more than I do in *la raison de l'Histoire*, in the reasonableness of history.

BOOKS & WRITERS

The Fork & the Fear

Remembering Gombrowicz—By JERZY PETERKIEWICZ

GOMBROWICZ at a café in Warsaw, shocking literary ladies with a fork. He picked his teeth with it. The café was called *The Country-Squire's*, but the adjectival form of the name in Polish somehow obscured the image of the squire. Translated into English or French, the name becomes visual; it exudes an almost grotesque *bonhomie*. So I see Gombrowicz at his favourite table as a squire on a prolonged visit to the capital, an absentee landlord, not quite here and never there. In later years he was to be haunted by precisely this mask which many of his foreign reviewers wanted him to wear. A Pole, therefore a nobleman: such a convenient label. He grew tired of it, understandably.

In 1936, however, he acted the part as if determined to impose this social cliché not only on the snobbish hangers-on, but also on his friends. As soon as he saw it was fully accepted, he would start poking at his own image with a word, a gesture, or a fork. An

idiosyncratic squire can simulate bad manners. Look, I did that, therefore it is done. A circle of literary buddies, their female companions in particular, were duly impressed.

All social shocks and counter-snobberies are infantile because their urge is regressive. Ferdydurke with his pants down, unpunishable for indecent exposure—all is part of the same game in the *kindergarten* of society.

"Oh, there are plenty of more or less puerile places in the world, but a country house is perhaps the most puerile of all. Here both masters and people turned themselves into children, preserved themselves by turning themselves into children, they were children to each other. Advancing barefoot along the corridor under the mask of night, I seemed to re-enter my aristocratic and pre-pubertal past . . . I succumbed to the anachronistic idea of a gigantic super-slap—an idea at one and the same time infantile and in accordance with immemorial tradition—a gigantic super-slap which should simultaneously liberate both master and child." (*Ferdydurke*, ch. 14).

WITOLD GOMBROWICZ was born in 1904, studied law in Warsaw, published his best novel *Ferdydurke* in 1937 and his first play *Princess Ivona* a year later. The outbreak of the War found him in Argentina where he had to live for over twenty years. In 1953 he unmasked his Polishness in a highly stylised mock-memoir, *Trans-Atlantic*, and embarked on a long and fastidious *Diary*, in which the first entry reads: "Monday: me, Tuesday: me, Wednesday: me, Thursday: me."

In 1963 he went to Berlin, then settled in the South of France where he died in 1969. Gombrowicz is better known in France and Germany than in Britain or the United States, although three of his novels and two plays are available in English. These are:

Ferdydurke, tr. Eric Mosbacher (MacGibbon & Kee, 1961, Calderbrook Paperback, 1965); *Pornografia*, tr. A. Hamilton (Calder & Boyars, 1966); *Cosmos*, tr. Eric Mosbacher (MacGibbon & Kee, 1967); *Princess Ivona*, tr. K. Griffith-Jones and C. Robins, 1969;

The Marriage, tr. L. Iribarne, 1970; both published by Calder & Boyars.

In all his works Gombrowicz is pre-occupied with the ritual of transformation. *Ferdydurke* is about a thirty-year-old man who is turned into a schoolboy. In *The Marriage*, which is a dream, Henry's father is transformed into a king, then he himself is transformed. In *Pornografia* (the title is misleading) as in *Ferdydurke*, the perennial hide-and-seek game is played between the generations: seduction versus submission under "the arch-bum shining in the sky." We are all deformed by one another. *Ferdydurke* ends with these words, addressed to the reader: "Come near, approach, start your work of making me a new face, so that I may run away from you in your turn towards other men, and run, run, and run through the whole of humanity. For there is no shelter from face except in face, and we can escape from men only by taking refuge in other men. And from the arch-bum there is no refuge. I fled, with my face in my hands."

Gombrowicz acted his tricks, made himself recognisable; he exaggerated to remain memorable. But memory is also an actor who exaggerates. In my recollections of Gombrowicz I have no continuous sequence from those Warsaw years; I see him in isolated scenes, each grotesquely augmented. And the voice so nasal that it seemed to prolong words—his fine nostrils quivering, like those of a thoroughbred colt, ready to snort at any moment. Or those regressively progressive walks at night in the summer. On the way home, "Come with me," he would say, "as far as Three Crosses Place"—so we walked and talked. Warsaw was not a big town, and soon there loomed the three crosses. "Now I'll walk you half-way back," he said. I lived near the river, and down-hill we went. Then it was my turn to be polite. Back to the Three Crosses. On good talking nights we could do that for hours, progressing and regressing through Warsaw.

Gombrowicz had rooms in a residential suburb, in a flat belonging, I think, to one of his aunts. An object on display was a pianola, and he teased his guests with mechanical tunes in much the same manner as he teased the café crowd with a fork. Look, how we love music, every Pole is a potential Chopin; so let's have Maestro Witold doing the grand stuff at the pianola.

MOCK-POLISHNESS, like the mock-squire, was a style against the style, the anti-cliché. He remained faithful to this technique and there are revealing pages in his *Diary* where he attacks the obsession: what-do-they-think-of-us? This adulation of the West by his countrymen—we are as good as they are, our bards are just like their bards, our cafés are just like their cafés. The same tunes of an old pianola to be replayed without effort.

But Ferdynand doesn't care about *them* and their opinion: he shows the world his Polish tongue, a juvenile jester incapable of keeping a solemn face. That's what I am, my own immaturity can teach as much history as the stuffed eagles in the patriotic zoo.

In *The Marriage*, the hero pleads:

*Enough of these gods! Give me man!
May he be like me, troubled and immature,
Confused and incomplete, dark and obscure
So that I can dance with him! Play with him!
Fight with him!
Pretend to him! Ingratiate myself with him!
And rape him, love him and forge myself
Anew from him, so I can grow through him...*

¹ In *The Marriage*, Henry addresses his father: "Father is a title the same as King is. Can't you speak like an ordinary man? Must you always get dressed up in some title or other?"

One of the best comments on Gombrowicz's involvement with his native tradition came years ago from Professor Folkierski, a comparativist of unusual acumen (he was, significantly enough, half-French). It was soon after the publication of *Trans-Atlantic* and the professor said to me: "You know, Gombrowicz is more traditional than one would imagine, he is the literary heir of Henryk Rzewuski, he works within the style of *gawęda* (a chatty narrative), the only form we Poles treat as our own invention." This sounded ironic: choosing an old-fashioned formula to explain a modern novelist, but Folkierski was too subtle for a mere reversal of terms. He stated something critically accurate.

Rzewuski (1791-1866), a pro-Russian aristocrat and a tireless raconteur, exploited the casual and anecdotal manner of social prattle in a collection of tales about originals, cranks and practical jokers in the Polish nobility of the 18th century. His own fictitious raconteur was a certain Soplica, a noble of course, and a candid admirer of every extravagance and absurdity which his class tolerated for the sheer joy of living, despite the approaching end of the Polish kingdom. Instinctively, Gombrowicz adopted this stylistic buffoonery because it suited him well, with its polite forms of address, its nudging asides and regressive humour. Moreover, it was the best medium with which to capture the self-perpetuating myth of adolescence, whether personal or national. Now he could laugh at the inflating preoccupation of Poles with their Polishness, which is not unlike the Frenchmen's preoccupation with their communal ethos. *La Gloire* and Self-destruction, the dichotomy of a patriotism which is particularly good at accusing. *J'accuse* of Emile Zola. Writing on the wall, putting men against the wall. Adolescents love scribbling their righteous protests on walls, and common citizens invariably fall short of the demands of the national Super-Ego. The language they inherit is also their undoing.

Gombrowicz understood his national identity because he was partly in love with *La Gloire* of his own ego. Perhaps the Pole is an *enfant terrible* among the Slavs, asking awkward questions, always on the run from the parental myth.¹ A squire or a peasant, he has enough aristocratic defiance to accept disillusionment.

WRITERS DO NOT, on the whole, acknowledge those literary debts which have affected their style: these are probably too intimate to reveal, even if one keeps a diary for public confessions, as Gombrowicz did. His

manner of writing stemmed from his Polish predecessors, both 19th century and more recent. Parody and mimicry need models to work on: a style cannot pull faces at nothing. The past was more useful to Gombrowicz than the present. And there were iconoclasts of genius before him. Irzykowski was one of them. His *Paluba*, a very early psycho-analytical novel (1903), owed nothing to Freud, but it probed deeply into patterns of self-deception, into bashful moments hiding behind big words and poses, it exposed both social and patriotic cant. The author saw his experiment as the triumphant comedy of character. Ferdynand's comedy is in essence triumphant.

Witkiewicz's novels and plays,² though uneven in dialogue, had much in common with Gombrowicz's handling of the plot, now coy, now arrogant. Both he and Gombrowicz were teasers, and literary teasers do sometimes irritate. They provoke the reader or the audience, but are surprised when the provocation works.³

Operetta comes towards the end of Gombrowicz's development, a stylistic résumé, full of conscious echoes and obvious borrowings. The revolutionary antics remind one of *The Undivine Comedy* (1835), a visionary and violent play written by the young romantic, Krasinski. The ridiculous songs with their obsessive repetitions belong to the evergreen musical *kitsch*, but real brutality is planted in the text like a time-bomb. As an artistic instrument the operetta is a sort of pianola, with Gombrowicz banging it until the whole pretence breaks to pieces. Another recollection intervenes. Among our contemporaries at *The Country-Squire's* was a character out of real operettas, who danced in the male chorus. Gombrowicz had a special nasal intonation whenever he addressed him, a curious respect for the triumphant courage of *kitsch*, and though the young man soon betrayed the glitter of the stage for the dimmed lights of literature, he had passed the test.

Undoubtedly, much of the 1930s is reflected in Gombrowicz's mimicry: the grand gestures of the silent films, the teasing eroticism of popular entertainment, the impoverished families that could still afford servants. And the intellectual mania for paradox. I was not surprised to see G. K. Chesterton mentioned alongside Joseph

² See Jan Kott's article on Witkiewicz ENCOUNTER, February 1970.

³ The fairy-tale trappings of Gombrowicz's plays belong to the Theatre of the Absurd, but the weakness of this type of drama lurks in the ritual of transformation itself, without which the absurd seems unable to function.

Khrushchev Remembers

With an Introduction,
Commentary and Notes by
Edward Crankshaw

Here is just a fraction of the more than 1,300 column inches that reviewers have devoted to this book in its first week of publication:

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'First things first. This is Nikita S. Khrushchev speaking. . . . *Khrushchev Remembers* is . . . a formidable document, a valuable testament in the history of Russian Communism.' Harrison Salisbury, *Sunday Times*. £3.50 (70s)

André Deutsch



Conrad in Gombrowicz's article which he contributed over a year ago to the *Times Literary Supplement*.⁴ But of course he could not have mentioned any other names because Chesterton and Conrad were the fashionable writers in Poland before the War, read by the young in translation. Chesterton's clowning must have impressed him at the time. My feeling is that Gombrowicz disliked the avant-garde writers as much as Byron disliked the romantics. In his Diaries he poured scorn on Borges. At the mention of Joyce he shrugged his shoulders. Nathalie Sarraute—"yes," he had met her, a sniff and a pause, and that was that. I sometimes suspect that he really didn't want to read any of them. But why should he? One thing remains certain: the importance of his Polish reading, from the 17th-century diarist Pasek to Sienkiewicz whom he mocked in much the same way as he mocked the world of his aunts.

He cared about language. The letters we exchanged in the last years were mainly about the translations of his works into English. He wanted my opinion about their style before they went to press. He was worried that the translators had to use the French or German versions. I argued that the translator's know-

ledge of his own tongue mattered more than his ignorance of Polish. The idiosyncratic style of Gombrowicz has structural patterns which can be reproduced in another language, and on the whole he translates better than most Slavonic novelists. He is essentially the writers' writer. Will he ever become popular?

The next thirty years should determine Gombrowicz's place in European literature. How his books will read in the future is difficult to predict. They are light, not ponderous, and the charm is in their lightness. The public unfortunately confounds weight with seriousness, length with permanence. Brevity may be the soul of wit, but the immortality of that soul is another question.

FAME NEEDS an aura of perpetual mystery. Gombrowicz took pains to project himself, and in his situation he had every right to do so. He argued with his critics in the Diaries, denigrated the denigrators and hailed those who hailed him. But my impression is that in the final analysis Gombrowicz's Diaries work against him. All artists are vulnerable. But Gombrowicz was so much preparing himself for the hostile world that he tended to over-explain himself. Twice I implored him to remove the personal prefaces he had written to guide his English critics. He persisted in building up a protective watch-tower. This he had done from the very beginning. In the name of sincerity, I suppose. He believed in the importance and survival of the printed word. Sometimes he seemed to forget that words too have their built-in obsolescence. They corrupt the sincerity that pushed them out. Pop art thrives on this transience.

I am glad I met him in my green youth. His integrity, his charm, his stylised manners were of the kind that elevate memories. He observed and described the regressive appetites of man at a time when fear pushed societies towards catastrophe. He was not, however, a prophet of doom; such prophets are many and are replaceable. Instead he played with a dainty fork, picking his teeth to shock the easily-shockable. How convincing is the violence of manners? The brutal forces today are horribly simple. They would knock the teeth out for a start. And then what would be the use of the fork, symbolic or otherwise? Our existence, like our literature, is becoming shock-proof.

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⁴ Published posthumously, *Times Literary Supplement*, 25 September 1969.

Private Chambers v. Public Chambers

By Wilfred Sheed

A REVIEWER is not, thank God, often required to judge an author on his legal merits. But the strange warp of Whittaker Chambers' career insists that even a benign collection of posthumous letters, *Odyssey of a Friend*,¹ must be read in the gloomy light of litigation. Never mind about his literary virtue—would the writer of this prose lie under oath or wouldn't he? When he testified against Alger Hiss, Chambers went for good from the anonymity of a *Time* editor to a desk in Macy's window where his words and his personality could never be separated again.

William F. Buckley, who received the letters in the first place, bows to the inevitable and introduces them as a character reference. They are not a bad one at that: certainly better than Chambers' own floundering attempt at one, the elephantine *Witness*. It could be that the subject was more plausible in private than in public; and he was certainly more plausible by 1961, when the collection ends, than in 1954 when it starts.

The Hiss case was largely a question of character even then (to younger readers that is all the question that's left). Long before the investigation had passed from dentures and prothonotary warblers to pumpkins and typewriters, the public had chosen up sides on a basis of Which Kind of Man do you Prefer. Chambers knew his revolutionary politics and was able to trace that part of Hiss' support which came from Communist whispers. But for several reasons, he was not up to date on American psychology, and never saw why at that particular moment a good many people found him hard to take, all on his own.

He was right about one part of it: people distrusted his religiosity. This distrust was supposed at the time to have something to do with the West's rejection of God. But if the Chambers of 1961 had re-read *Witness* (he could not bear to see it lying about the house by then), he might have distrusted the religiosity himself. It is very much part of the period: the post-war spirit boom, when all kinds of unlikely people were hearing voices

and receiving signs. Chambers himself left the Party because he heard "words," telling him to choose freedom—a motive which even religious sympathisers might now advise him to keep under his hat. And he rested his case against Communism entirely on theology, or holy-war theory, where secular readers could hardly be expected to join him. Later, Max Eastman was to lead a charge against compulsory theism for conservatives: but at that point, the words atheistic and communism were seldom far apart.

Curiously, in these later letters there is very little reference to God. Chambers presumably remained a religious man to the end, but the confessional fever subsided, as it did with other converts of the time, and his case against Communism became more earthly. "The West ... has two main goods to offer mankind: freedom and abundance" we find him writing—a far cry from the days when it offered God, or nothing.

CHAMBERS' RELIGIOSITY was also served a poor turn by his conditions of employment. As a writer for a news magazine, he had taken it upon himself to reduce his spiritual gropings to simple big-picture terms: the West, History, Man's Spirit, the hundred great capital letters. Most intellectuals would have given up the struggle as hopeless. A news magazine is not obliged to cover the Mysteries. But Chambers had a mission to fight Communism, and this was the only way he could do it. He was shunted out of *Foreign News*, and anywhere else where he could attack the enemy head-on. So he took to plugging the Western Tradition in Dick and Jane terms in any department that would let him. I had assumed that the florid simplifications were foisted on him by the magazine. But it seems likely that he foisted them on the magazine. And several of the pieces that had one wincing the hardest (e.g., the Arnold Toynbee cover story) were among Chambers' special prides.

The democratisation of great ideas was again part of the period, and perhaps it was snobbish to jeer at it. Anyway, people did, and it was part of the extra-legal case against Chambers, which he never seemed to fathom.

¹*Odyssey of a Friend, Whittaker Chambers Letters to William F. Buckley, Jr., 1954-1961. Putnams.*

For he found the habit hard to slip, and there are still great wedges of old-Time rhetoric in *Witness*, when he might have come on as the subtle and quite pragmatic thinker that these letters reveal.

For his pains, he acquired a reputation as a dime-store mystic, a *Time-Life* Dostoevsky, who couldn't see anything smaller than History: certainly nothing as small as a micro-film. The narrative parts of *Witness* are reasonably sober and convincing: working on a news magazine is not all bad. But then he would blow it with garrulous metaphors about Western Man struggling up the Cliff, metaphors which he seemed unable to turn off. And the credibility of the quiet parts was seriously damaged.

The rhetoric gets a few brisk airings in the first letters to Buckley: "I never really hoped to do more in the Hiss case than give the children of men a slightly better, only slightly better, chance to fight a battle already largely foredoomed," etc., etc. A fine way to write to a friend. At this point he was still half in public, displaying his wares: the mechanical inflation of everything, the trade-marked pessimism, the gaseous abstractions. Just when you're used to thinking of yourself as the West, you find you've become the children of men and Mr Chambers is giving you a second chance. It took no Communist plot to make this seem tiresome.

BUT THIS CHANGES quite sharply as we go along. Occasionally the rhetoric is challenged into life by some threat to make him public again. But his usual tone is not only moderate but scrupulously sensible. Hissites will no doubt find stray evidence of derangement, as when he writes seven-page letters and burns them (Chambers was a great burner), and then writes to tell Buckley he burned them; or when he doesn't open letters he gets himself. But this jumpiness seems normal enough, unless one disbelieves *Witness* altogether. Chambers may or may not have been in danger of murder when he left the Communist Party, but he surely had reason to think he was. The fact that he was theatrical about it doesn't mean that it didn't happen. (Theatrical people are always being persecuted.) For a year, he worked at night with a gun on his table, not knowing whether he was important enough for execution; not knowing in his bones whether the people he'd worked with *did* things like that.

This uncertainty accounts for a certain fantastic quality whenever he discusses revolution

in the letters. The American party was trying to import a European religion, in which assassination was certainly part of the ritual. But had it survived the journey, the way the Mafia had? Or were the American communists partly playing at it? Chambers writes about their fanatical dedication unto death. But when a party-member came looking for him after his defection, said member gave up after a nervous glance: with the best will in the world, this pale literary agent could not make himself into the Mafia type. At that same time of the Moscow-German pact, European defectors were being gunned down as far west as Paris; but Americans had to imagine themselves into European situations to feel the same fear.

This was not difficult for Chambers, whose mind was always set towards Europe anyway and who was taken for a European by his Communist contacts. His hunters may not have known their roles, but he knew his. These letters long after the event are still packed with anecdotes of gallant European Bolsheviks showing excruciating dedication under fire. It is hard to feel this way about Elizabeth Bentley. But Chambers did his personal best to translate the atmosphere to America, and to incarnate, in himself, the stoic, world-weary Communist he believed in so ardently. Cut off from society, a hunted man in Baltimore, it was not hard for a gifted writer to imagine himself in St. Petersburg.

With so much of the revolution going on in his head, it is not surprising that he jumped when the postman came. A Hissite would no doubt press the point and say that Chambers was a role-player to the core, a cardboard revolutionary living out a dream. A Hissite would also dig out the familiar memory lapses—Chambers could not remember whether he had ever written about a particular man in *Time*, astounding in a writer—and the desolating melancholia, interspersed with skittishness.

STILL, THE LETTERS would disappoint him, I think. Chambers' role-playing, if that's what it was, included a respect for the small facts, whether as spy or farmer. He took himself deadly seriously in the role of witness and was sometimes unintentionally funny about it. (For instance, after quoting a passage Trotsky wrote in 1902, he pauses to say, "I was then one year and several months of age." Or discussing Randall Jarrell, he says, "Jarrell is as certain a sign of the end as I am." Such portentous self-insertions pop up *passim*.) But in practice, as opposed to talk, he was pretty sensible about

it. He declined to become a cocktail-party witness, or a lecture-circuit witness, and he didn't set out his shingle as a permanent oracle. Murray Kempton has pointed out that he did like to suggest mysterious private pipelines when the mood was on him and to come the old revolutionary who knows what he knows. But he also admitted that he was nearly always wrong about American politics, and he indulged in free-wheeling guesses without pretending they were based on any post-1938 party secrets. (Checked out from our present vantage points, they certainly weren't.)

In another respect, these letters clarify Chambers perhaps a little more than he might have cared to be clarified at the time. There are two sides to every revolutionary, and Chambers had chosen to show the visionary, garment-rending one to the secular public. But now he was writing to a Catholic romantic and a change of tactics was called for: the pragmatic, so-what, does-it-work? side, which had nailed Hiss, rhetoric notwithstanding, surfaces all the way for Buckley.

In *Witness*, he had still been facing towards the Communists, barely aware of his own allies. These were just the simple people who phoned up and said "God bless you," in the middle of the night; honest, unintellectual folk who understood life's processes. (He was particularly charmed by a gun salesman in Baltimore who recommended aiming both barrels at prowlers and "Fay-ya-you-well.") He did not yet understand that it was his allies who frightened people the most. Cultural wars, quite outside his Communist closed shop, were in progress, and his case managed to land plumb in the middle of them.

After the case, he had more time to look around at his new friends. The first thing he saw was Senator Joe McCarthy, and it was like a convert finding his first difficult doctrine. Swallow as he could, it wouldn't go down. He hadn't given up Communism to range himself with Yahooism. It might even have occurred to him at this point that simple people who call in the night are not necessarily well-wishers.

Next he found Mr Buckley, and that worked out much better. These two devotees of the simple folk were able to swap high culture and enough good argumentation to keep an ex-Marxist sharp. The intellectual training of Marxism can make the Right a lonely place and a man who knows his St. Thomas is a windfall. "You are articulate (rare on the Right)," he says. No matter what you think of pink professors and the like, it is always disconcerting to find that your side

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is dumber than theirs. "Think of it," he groans. "In this great power, the Right can find no voice to speak for it except Senators McCarthy and Knowland."

Buckley also offered him two attractions of which the Right has its own versions: agrarianism (at least, one assumes the silent partner was interested; he certainly got an earful) and Europe. Chambers moved from a Europe-centred Left to a Europe-centred Right. Among all the German tags and Russian fables, I could barely find a single reference to American culture, except a slighting one to Elvis Presley, a stilted one to Rocky Marciano "(if that is his name)" and some praise for Randall Jarrell. In a passage worthy of Graham Greene, he says that Alger Hiss "looks like the American boy... clean-cut, 'nice,' probably played basketball... America is dying of the American boy." His good-hearted admirers might have been startled by this. They could hardly have supposed that America was dying of the American boy.

There wasn't much else that was congenial over on the Right. He underwent one of his formidable soul-searchings as to whether to join the *National Review*, but he seems to have spent a lot of time heckling it. He could see no earthly reason why Alger Hiss, or anyone else, should be denied a passport. The number of spies who travelled would be trivial. That wasn't what the fight for the West was about anyway. He abhorred wire-tapping and believed that conservatives should take over the cause of Civil Liberties. As the cumulus of rhetoric lifts, it is harder and harder to see what he has in common with his new side.

MOURNFULLY, he runs his knife down the pasted-over area on the American Right. "A capitalist cannot be a conservative." There is no greater agent of change than a capitalist. Yet Chambers prefers him to the woolly machine-haters who grind their own burlap, and while protesting that money bores him, he goes on about his own investments at some length, in a tone of strenuous whimsy ("we are heavy people," says Esther Chambers). One senses by now that it is an effort to don the metaphysical robes. He chides the Right for its impracticability, even as a liberal might. And in a final whittling down of his past, he even appears to give up on Nixon, his first and last ally on the political Right. "We had nothing to talk about," he says. The old subversive will not be taken for granted by anybody.

The neutral good sense of these criticisms does much to bolster his credit, retroactive to the Hiss case. Buckley has allowed a few good shots to be taken at his own positions in order to rescue a friend. Liberal leaders will likely agree that whoever wrote these last letters could have been a reliable witness and what they took to be hysteria might have been an extreme case of Cold War fever (or frostbite). As that let up, so did Chambers. His tone is so different by the end that it might be a different man—except that, at his worst, one still felt he could turn his mysticism on and off at will.

HIS CRITICS have sometimes applied more rigorous tests of sanity to Chambers than they would to most writers. A bad poet should be allowed his licence too: and Chambers' worst flights strike one now as nothing more sinister than failed poetry. He was, incidentally, quite a good prose writer. But his most pernicious dream was that his sensibility was poetic; and he paid and paid for it. A dedicated witness should sacrifice such talents. As it was, the people who knew him and worked with him believed him in impressive numbers, but people who only read him had trouble.

Of course, to believe him is not necessarily to like him. His devotees still push him a bit too hard, accepting his own estimate of himself as somebody pretty damn important over whom one must choose sides. (One's response to this is apt to be surly.) In the flesh he seems to have affected people violently, but in his letters he simply doesn't have that kind of voltage, except in the context of his Case. He obviously had a gift for what the Jesuits call "particular friendships," but outsiders are not warmed by this as much as the particular friends always seem to expect. Several times he tells Buckley that only thrice in his life (biblical sonority) has he had such a good friend as Bill—a bit hard on the particular friends he had over at *Time*, and elsewhere. But one assumes that he made them seem special too, at the moment.

Chambers also worked strenuously at maintaining his friendships, and while the flow of gratitude and apology makes for occasional sticky reading, it also suggests, in line with Buckley's purpose, a character that would not betray a friend like Hiss for the sake of showing off. Fair enough. But I believe what bothered St. Ignatius about particular friendships was the question, where do they leave the rest of us? Chambers was undeniably clique-y, as Great Friends tend to be, and he divided Buckley's *National Review*, as he had *Time-Life*,

sharply into the Good and the Childish (a favourite term of opprobrium) or the historically irrelevant. There was no malice about it, but a good deal of condescension.

And what was this West that he loved so much? On a trip to post-war Europe, he managed to despise both the locals, for exploiting the tourists (which was not unreasonable of them at the time) and the tourists for being exploited. His West seemed to contain precious few living people, outside of a few heroes and cronies. Its main virtue was that it was not the East, which he really loathed. Chambers had a generous spirit, for those close to him, and for a few symbolic figures in the distance, selected peasants and old revolutionaries; but it could only work by choosing and discarding, by drawing a circle around what he liked and anathematising everything outside it.

YET PERHAPS A MAN who enrolls in college at 57 is not to be judged too easily. The growth and change recorded in these letters is surely exceptional in a man of his age. It is a pity that we don't hear the other side of the exchange, because Buckley also changed during those years from a one-sided point-scorer to a man who understood his opponents' ground increasingly well; and Chambers may have had something to do with it. This could just have been the changing times, Chambers' beloved History, that sweeps us all along, journalists in front. But reflecting on the sober sense of the later letters, one wonders whether Chambers, having whipped up so many Furies on the Right, did not help a little to calm them down and give us that brief interregnum between paranoias that seems now to be drawing to a close.

Snatching the Bays

By Douglas Dunn

WHILE AUDEN WATCHES the gloss fade from his reputation, like an old Cunarder tied up in the States and used as a Conference Centre, Robert Lowell has snatched the Bays. Lowell, in addition to the excellences that have always existed in his work, has winningly introduced a poetic conscience to the understanding of public events, and, especially in the new *Notebook*,¹ dramatised the dilemmas of public life and private feeling. It could be argued that this is not new to poetry in English, but it is certainly crucial to the American context, and even more important is the manner in which Lowell has assumed his role, with a nervous subtlety of feeling and statement that represents a major innovation in poetry.

Lauded, his work subjected to extended criticism, interviewed and invited, Lowell seems strong enough to withstand the ardours of literary admiration, even when these approach the scale usually reserved for The Elders and the mighty dead. Nor, in spite of his political interests, does he seem likely to become either Orator or Oracle, for in even these poems where public or political events are introduced directly, it is still Lowell's personal response which predominates, thickly accented with culture and private gloom:

AFTER THE CONVENTION

*Life, hope, they conquer death, generally,
always;
and if the steamroller goes over the flower, the
flower dies.
Some are more solid earth; they stood in lines,
blouse and helmet, a creamy de luxe sky-blue—
the music, savage and ephemeral. . . .
After five nights of Chicago: police and mob,
I am so tired and had, clichés are wisdom,
the clichés of paranoia. On this shore,
the fall of the high tide waves is a straggling,
joshing,
march of soldiers . . . on the march for me . . .
How slender and graceful, the double line of
trees,
how slender, graceful, irregular and underweight,
the young in black folk-fire circles below the
trees—
under their shadow, the green grass turns to hay.*

The poem is lyrical and reflective, and, given its context, everything that the American protest movement is not. Lowell is still as anomalous as a poet ought to be.

Above all, Lowell continues to write, and if the length of *Notebook* is anything to go by, to write continuously. *Notebook*, in fact, would appear to be, by its very nature, an enterprise of that kind—like Byron's *Don Juan*, but cumulating through the progress of the poet's life instead of the addition of fresh dramatic episodes.

The British publication of *Notebook* marks its third edition. Ninety new sections have

¹ *Notebook*. By ROBERT LOWELL. Faber, £2.25.

been added to two American editions, and one hundred of the original sections revised. In his eloquent "Afterthought" Lowell anxiously tries to persuade the reader that *Notebook* is one poem:

... as my title intends, the poems in this book are written as one piece, intuitive in arrangement, but not a pile or sequence of related material. It is less an almanac than the story of my life.

It would be wrong, I think, to regard *Notebook* as that rarity of contemporary literature, a long poem, which would have to be, in Lowell's words, "a pile or sequence of related material." Yet it may not be as contradictory as it seems if *Notebook's* many "fourteen line unrhymed black verse sections" be regarded as "one poem." It is a question of distinguishing between a poem made up of many poems, some in sequences, some standing separately, and arranged by the poet in such a way that they bear some relation to the pattern of his life, and the consecutive long poem.

Whatever we think of *Notebook's* form, the writing is consistently brilliant, and proof, if any more is needed, that Lowell is one of the most accomplished exponents of the art alive.

Lowell has always been ambitious, showing a preference for the large canvas, but *Notebook* amplifies everything promised by the earlier poems. The language is as graceful and as cultured as ever:

*The grip gets puffy, and water wears the stones—
O to be always young among our friends,
as one of the countless peers who graced the
world
with their murders and joie de vivre, made good
in a hundred aimless amorous bondages . . .*

THE DUC DE GUISE

Lowell's imagination has always thrived on the nourishing pottage of European and American history. In *Notebook*, his recall of history provides surrogates for contemporary dilemmas (e.g. "Attila"/destruction; "Mary Stuart"/political murder), while the American characters and events are more than significant poetic hindsight but, in the context of the events of 1967-1970 that come into the poem, stand as fundamental American knowledge. This aspect of the book, while attractive, is probably subsidiary. After all, the poem is, as its maker is at pains to make clear, the story of his life. Friendships, loyalties, fears, loves, suffering—these all arise, expressed, as in his previous work, with a combination of tenderness and intellect, the unspecifiable nature of

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which Lowell's readers will recognise as familiar from *Life Studies* and other books.

Randall Jarrell, in 1943, reviewing *The Land of Unlikeness*, Lowell's first book, foresaw that Lowell ought to write the best poems of the age. The prophesy has long been fulfilled, but *Notebook* is the major endeavour so far, both as regards scale and innovation. As a record of life it is incomparable. "This open book—my open coffin," he says in "Reading Myself," a final, apt and disturbing statement.

A CAREER OF JUST OVER thirty-five years has added up to the two hundred and ten pages of Elizabeth Bishop's *Complete Poems*,² a small but distinguished corpus. Underproduction is no inhibitor of accomplishment, nor of the praise that should come with it. Miss Bishop is a poet well aware of her limitations, and within her range her work is flawless.

She is no friend of the city, but I cannot resist quoting the four lines from her "Letter to N.Y." which first recommended her to me: If

*taking cabs in the middle of the night,
driving as if to save your soul
where the road goes round and round the park
and the meter glares like a moral owl.*

² *The Complete Poems*. By ELIZABETH BISHOP. Chatto & Windus, £2.25.

there is one quality that is Miss Bishop's own, it is this accuracy of description, sufficiently loaded as to suggest more than the immediately obvious. In the lines quoted the exuberance of the nostalgia combines with the mischief of the imagery to produce a typical effect. This kind of writing has not always been present in her work. *North and South*, for example, Miss Bishop's first book (1946), was full of complex and powerful contempt for the city, a brooding which began to mellow by the end of the book. In "The Man-Moth," a strangely disconnected but convincing projection of urban malevolence, she demonstrated her talent for effective fantasy. The writing is very strong:

*If you catch him
hold up a flashlight to his eye. It's all dark pupil,
an entire night itself, whose haired horizon
tightens
as he stares back, and closes up the eye. Then
from the lids
one tear, his only possession, like the bee's
sting slips.
Slyly he palms it, and if you're not paying
attention
he'll swallow it. However, if you watch, he'll
hand it over,
cool as from underground springs and pure
enough to drink.*

Political Quarterly in the 30s

Edited by W.A. Robson

Published to mark the fortieth anniversary of *The Political Quarterly*, this is a collection of seventeen key essays written during the immensely important decade preceding the Second World War.

Introduction by W.A. Robson
£3.15

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Leonard Woolf
W. Ivor Jennings
J. A. Hobson
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Mary Stocks
Tom Wilson
R. H. S. Crossman

A quite definite change of style took place for the second book, *A Cold Spring*, which has less fantasy (with the exception of the sprightly "Invitation to Miss Marianne Moore") and less urban melancholy. Instead, she was able to offer a new quality of description, precise yet slightly eccentric; in a word, individual, and still clearly drawing from the same resources of imaginative power that made possible such earlier poems as "Love Lies Sleeping," "Large Bad Picture" and "The Man-Moth."

*There is a fence of chicken wire along the dock
where, glinting like little plowshares,
the blue-gray shark tails are hung up to dry
for the Chinese-restaurant trade.
Some of the little white boats are still piled up
against each other, or lie on their sides, stove in,
and not yet salvaged, if they ever will be, from
the last bad storm,
like torn-open, unanswered letters.
The bight is littered with old correspondences.
Click. Click. Goes the dredge,
and brings up a dripping jawful of marl.
All the untidy activity continues,
awful but cheerful.*

Miss Bishop's gifts matured for *Questions of Travel*. In "Manuelzinho", for example, a monologue addressed to a roguish Brazilian peasant and in which the speaker is a friend of the writer, she manages to make the ironic cutback of the dramatic monologue co-exist with good humour and her usual strong observations. No one interested in contemporary poetry can afford not to read this fresh and, for all the directness of its speaking voice, intricate poem.

NO RECENT VOLUME of poetry has acquired so much instant celebrity as Ted Hughes's *Crow*.³ The publisher announces that they are already into a third impression (and for Hughes print-runs will be well above the usual), and one London bookshop alone is said to have sold more than six hundred copies. Relentless, powerful and original, it has been the sheer impact of *Crow* that has won it success. We are back to the days of *Marmion* and *Childe Harold* or the successes of Tennyson. And no bad thing.

The crow is well known in folk iconography as a symbol of discord and strife, but the Crow of Ted Hughes's imagination probably comes from the Great Crow or Crow Father of Eskimo and American Indian mythology. The "Two Eskimo Songs" in the book indicate

that Hughes is familiar with this material, and no doubt the men in the universities are at work to tell us just exactly what Hughes has been able to take from it. At this stage, however, we should be content to take Crow and the part Hughes makes him play as a product of Hughes's imagination, as an objective correlative for Hughes's personal suffering, and his vision of a universe in torment.

An easy way to take issue with Hughes is to claim that he overstates the agony of life:

*People were running with bandages
But the world was a draughty gap
The whole creation
Was just a broken gutterpipe*

(THE SMILE)

*Who is stronger than hope? Death.
Who is stronger than the will? Death.
Stronger than love? Death.
Stronger than life? Death.*

(EXAMINATION AT THE WOMB DOOR)

*Even man he was a walking
Abattoir
Of innocents
His brain incinerating their outcry.*

(CROW TYRANNOSAURUS)

Not for a single line is *Crow* milder than this. The language is always strong and simple, the invention harsh. A word-mastering effort of the imagination has created a terrible vision of elemental fierceness, metaphysical wastes, horror, pain and guilt in which all that can be guaranteed survival is silence, watched over by King of Carrion. But Hughes has his enemies. Some reviewers have claimed that Crow's career is an expression of misanthropy, and not of authentic feelings. This is more or less the same as claiming that Hughes misunderstands the nature of the world, having been too preoccupied with its violence. In a phrase from Berenson's art criticism, they say that Hughes's work is not "life-enhancing." These objections are mistaken. No one denies that Hughes's vision is terrifying; but it exists in nothing else than a poetic recognition of the universal *status quo*. On the scale of Hughes's power and artistry, this is a long way off from the familiar schools of dandified desperation. There are no gentle circumlocutions in *Crow*, no easy ways out. These may be the fiercest poems in the language, but they are not inhuman.

WIT AND INVENTION bound through Peter Porter's fourth collection like mad wallabies. *The Last of England*⁴ comes only a year after *A Porter Folio*, and a good conclusion to draw from this is that at least one poet other than Robert Lowell has the courage of his

³ *Crow*. By TED HUGHES. Faber, £1.00.

⁴ *The Last of England*. By PETER PORTER. Oxford University Press, 75p.

notebooks to publish and be damned. Not much here could be called slapdash, however, although slapstick may be another matter; that is, if slapstick can operate on the high intellectual plane of the Porter milieu, throwing custard pies with one hand while the other holds *The Decline of the West*. Or perhaps I have seen exuberance so seldom in contemporary poetry and characterise Porter's undoubted achievements with the wrong label.

I should redouble my qualification of these remarks by emphasising that Porter is a serious and dedicated poet and no mere humorist. Nor is his publisher's epithet "social poet" satisfactory. The best poems in this new volume—"The Widow's Story," "Elegy," "Europe," "On This Day I Complete My Fortieth Year"—lie uneasily in that description. In "Elegy" he mourns the ascendancy of his literary dislikes:

*What is he to make of Pan's Festival
where the corona and bays are awarded
unanimously to the Laureates of Low Spirits
and a group of formation dancers
called Maud is interpreting scansion,
where the vatic confessional
is booked for the evening and Positive
Evil is seriously on the syllabus?*

How he hails them, the Comforters and Old-Time

*Resistors he remembers from many a march:
they turn away and hand him a journal
with obscenities reversed out on pink paper;
a page of the telephone directory
serves as a libretto; someone says
An American Machine is coming
with Hot Gothic printed on its brow.*

The excellent of this apocalypse is obvious, but there are subtle personal effects as well:

*the porter's
habit of reading his letters and hiding
the envelopes no longer seems out of Gogol.*

*Tell the neighbours the news—
I come from a factory of the mad
but I am at home to my mother
the city. She will come to me.*

Porter's satiric interests are still as sharp and well-primed as ever. "Applause for Death", wittily grotesque and amusingly rhymed, is as good as anything he has done in this vein, and there is "More from Martial" too. Quirky, autobiographical humour thrives in "The Sanitised Sonnets":

*Much have I travelled in the realms of gold
for which I thank the Paddington and
Westminster
Public Libraries: and I have never said sir
to anyone since I was seventeen years old.*

At its worst (and this is seldom) Porter's work can be gaudy, the striving after novel

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effects forced and uneasy. When he writes well the skill and gravity are remarkably convincing:

*The mystery of our sacrifices, our
Faustian bargains, the golden pledges
Of loves we've spent are only
Pitch-pine on a fire: we world-eaters
Are eaten in our turn and if we shout
At the gods they send us the god of death
Who is immortal and who cannot read.*

Idiom, technique, subject matter, all are measured and authentic. Porter is coming into his own.

TONY HARRISON'S FIRST BOOK is *The Loiners*⁵ (named for the inhabitants of Leeds), and offers more than promise. There are serious flaws in his work, however, the most blatant being a reliance on the conservative technique of the couplet, which a heavy inlay of sex and surprise does little to update. "Ginger's Friday", "The Pocket Wars of Peanuts Joe" and "Allotments" celebrate early sexual encounters. The wit is startling and assured, but Harrison imposes banal rhythms on his material, and the result is a relentless and, to my taste, rather thin jokiness, although this is partially redeemed by his fine dramatic sense.

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*The graveyards of Leeds 2
Were hardly love-nests but they had to do—
Through clammy mackintosh and winter vest
And rumpled jumper for a touch of breast.
Stroked nylon crackled over groin and bum
Like granny's wireless stuck on Hilversum.
And after love we'd find some epitaph
Embossed backwards on your arse and laugh.*

Also technically impressive are Harrison's Nigerian pieces, but the sexuality is overdone. Harrison, however, can create a convincing character, in this case an expat Loiner, the PWD Man, put across with much noisy enthusiasm in Kiplingesque metre. Apart from its interest as narrative, and its sheer readability, the only meaning here, as in much of Harrison's work, is a rudimentary Fuck and be Fucked, which in Harrison's distillation seems to be what the glamour of darkest Africa boils down to.

The two final poems, "Newcastle is Peru" and "Ghosts: Some Words Before Breakfast", are much better. Harrison handles the notoriously difficult octosyllabic couplet well, and achieves more rhythmic subtlety than in the pentameters of the earlier poems.

World-wide in its topography, powerful in its effects, Harrison's poetry is a stunning addition to the scene. His contemporaries can already feel the competition breathing down their backs.

ALTHOUGH WIDELY READ in his native Scotland, Ian Crichton Smith has still to acquire the more widespread reputation he deserves. Unfortunately, his *Selected Poems*⁶ are unlikely to serve him well in this. Much of the book collects material not available in the three volumes published between 1961 and 1969, including his long and boring meditation "Deer on the High Hills", another long sequence called "By the Sea", some new poems and a translation of a Gaelic piece. This book is therefore not so much a genuine selection as a new collection with some poems added from the three books. His admirers will be obliged to get the book, but the omissions are likely to prove disappointing. For example, "To Forget the Dead", "Highlanders" and "Culloden and After", to name only three.

In *The Penguin Book of Socialist Verse*⁷ I expected to find bad poems by good communists, but I found, on the whole, good

⁵ *The Loiners*. By TONY HARRISON. London Magazine Editions, £1.25.

⁶ *Selected Poems*. By IAN CRICHTON SMITH. Gollancz, £1.80.

⁷ *The Penguin Book of Socialist Verse*. Edited by ALAN BOLD. Penguin, 60p.

poems by men who, in anybody's Party, could only be heretics, men of conscience, sympathy and courage. Although I suspect any poet who enters politics or ideology, or even café polemics, I can recommend this as the most ardent anthology on the market, full of passion, idealism and tragedy. But its editor, Alan Bold, ought to be rebuked if he thinks that sympathy for the oppressed is a socialist monopoly.

"A reasonably comprehensive survey of the poetry which has been written in Britain since the war," says Edward Lucie-Smith of his *British Poetry since 1945*.⁸ "But", he adds, "there are some poets whom I have quite unrepentantly omitted." Who are Mr Lucie-Smith's bogeymen? A bad-mannered situation

⁸ *British Poetry Since 1945*. Edited by EDWARD LUCIE-SMITH. Penguin, 50p.

in which to speculate, perhaps, but at any rate most of the poets associated with *the Review* will not be found here—Ian Hamilton, Hugo Williams, David Harsent, Colin Falck. And among older generations, Alan Ross, Gavin Ewart, Dannie Abse and Kathleen Raine are left out, while Lucie-Smith is unable to find room for younger men such as Ken Smith, author of *The Pity*, or the gifted Ulster poet, Michael Longley. Considering the drivel which Mr Lucie-Smith prints after page 353 and calls "New", these gaps are hard to take. On the credit side, Lucie-Smith prints enough fine poems that not only argue for the good health of contemporary poetry, but for what I suppose is his own basic good taste in the poetry he knows about. The anthology is intelligently arranged, but although valuable for what it does print, is far from definitive on account of what has been left out.

Heroic Curiosity

By Derwent May

ENTHUSIASTS for Anthony Powell wait for new volumes in *The Music of Time* much as in the early nineteenth century the people of Peebles waited for a man called Tam Fleck to call in the evening. Fleck is to be found in the memoirs of William Chambers, the Edinburgh publisher: he owned a copy of Josephus's history of the Jews, and went round from house to house in Peebles reading it as the current news:

"Weel, Tam, what's the news the night?" would old Geordie Murray say, as Tam entered with his Josephus under his arm.

"Bad news, bad news," replied Tam. "Titus has begun to besiege Jerusalem—it's gaun to be a terrible business."

So it is with Powell. It is news he seems to bring. "What's Widmerpool been doing, has Moreland been seen again, has Nick remembered another story about Mr Deacon?": these are the questions each fresh book in its pepper-and-cassata jacket now excites—not the superficial "What's Powell's new novel about?"

The character of Nick, the narrator, becomes clearer than ever before, I think, in *Books Do*

*Furnish A Room*¹ tenth and latest in the sequence. He never says much about himself, but he is far from being a negligible personality: what he has is an heroic curiosity at the same time as perfect good-breeding, a rare and continually exhilarating combination for his readers. He has also, of course, the indispensable knack of being around just when interesting things are happening—only so has he managed to fill ten books with accounts of his relatives and friends by the age of forty. The main history in the new book concerns the marriage of Widmerpool, now a Labour MP and a PPS, to Pamela Flitton, the more than nubile ATS driver who made her appearance in the war volumes. Nick contrives to be (or to coin a perhaps needed passive voice here, "is contrived to be") present at all the following crucial scenes in this history. The night the philandering novelist, X. Trapnel, overcome by love for Pamela Widmerpool, cannot even bring himself to pronounce her name, and has to write it on the back of a review slip, inserted earlier by him in a book he is carrying in order to "mark a passage of notable ineptitude." The night Widmerpool arrives back in his Victoria Street flat to find that Pamela has gone, with her bags and her Modigliani, and that she has left a short message to that effect with the civil servant in Widmerpool's ministry who happens

¹ *Books Do Furnish A Room*. By ANTHONY POWELL. Heinemann, £1.75.

to live beneath him. The night Widmerpool calls on the errant couple in their filthy Maida Vale flat to express his contempt, and is answered by Trapnel with the tense but dignified cry "Would you oblige me by removing your hat from off my books?" And the night Pamela leaves Trapnel—an event he learns of by discovering the only manuscript of his latest novel floating down the canal off the Edgware Road, thrown there by her on her way out.

These are all classic moments of Powellite pleasure. The gravity of the incidents, for the participants, is never played down; yet they are displayed in their full entanglement in a thousand unrepeatable and hitherto unimagin-

able circumstances, in which the apt and the grating, the grotesque and the poignant, the poetic and the sordid tumble wildly over each other. There is also a note of cheer and reassurance to set against the gravity. Nick recalls at one point the opinion of General Conyers that seems more and more to reflect his own conclusion about the people he meets in 20th-century England:

"If you bring off adequate preservation of your own personal myth, nothing much else in life matters. It is not what happens to people that is significant, but what they think happens to them."

In other words, everyone hears, and goes on trying to dance to, a different tune in the music of time—it is only people like Nick who hear something of all the tunes. What is important is that through all this story, whatever strains they may be undergoing, Widmerpool and Pamela and Trapnel are still listening intently, and trying to perform their own necessary dance. And when, at the end of the book, Trapnel seems to be giving up, Powell does not spare us the melancholy: there is often gaiety, but never flippancy, in Nick's voice.

DAN JACOBSON has made a remarkable novel out of a story the people of Peebles might actually have heard from Fleck: the rape of King David's daughter Tamar by her half-brother Amnon.² In Jacobson's hands, the few lines in 2 *Samuel* recording the event have grown—with a push, probably, from their elaboration in Josephus—into a wonderfully cogent study of the psychology of the powerful. The narrator of the story is Yonadab, a minor kinsman of David, whose father is a flunkey at the court. What Yonadab sees as the over-riding characteristic of all the great ones around him is credulity. Amnon believes that if he possesses Tamar, he will pass beyond the laws and enter some unfathomable state of ecstasy, even divinity. But his disappointment is so bitter that, the morning afterwards, he throws her out just like the whores on other mornings. Absalom, Tamar's brother, using the avengement of Tamar as his first platform, believes he can soar to power as the champion of the people, the deliverer of the nation from his father's palsied hand. He ends his life being speared by David's soldiers as he hangs by his neck in a forked branch of a tree. But David

² *The Rape of Tamar*. By DAN JACOBSON. Weidenfeld & Nicolson, £1.50.

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has credulity of a different order: his sons' stupidity is fed by the power he has conferred on them, but credulity is the source of his supreme power. We get a fine description of his capacity to believe that whatever action is politically shrewd is divinely inspired and superlatively noble:

Who but David could employ butchers like Joab and Abishai as his commanders and executioners; yet go around the palace sighing and wringing his hands over their ruthlessness? . . . I insist: I am not accusing David of hypocrisy. On the contrary, I am accusing him of sincerity We in the palace, hardened professionals, were constantly abashed by the brilliant, unflawed purity of that conscience of his.

The most moving moment in the book is, by contrast, a moment of terrible and unassailable insight: that of the simple Tamar, on the morning after the rape, when she knows there is only one role for her in life now, that of heroine-victim, and she goes bedraggled and bloody into the streets of Jerusalem that she has never even stood in before, to shout her shame to everyone.

All this story is told by Yonadab with a swift, unfaltering intelligence that one hardly associates with novel-writing any more. At the same time, Yonadab has a quite different part to play—an Iago's role. It is he who leads Amnon on, and who devises the plot to get Tamar to his house. Then, to complete Amnon's destruction, and to start Absalom's, he conspires with Absalom over how to kill Amnon in spite of David's protection. He tells us the story as a ghost—a ghost who has kept up with events in the 3000 years since his death (he discusses Kant) and who is also in a dreadful purgatory of self-hatred over what he did in his life. This is a highly successful invention of Jacobson's from many points of view: especially it makes possible the narrative's flexibility and range, passing in a moment, for example, from the evocation of the morning sunlight in Jerusalem as Tamar leaves Amnon's house, to a vision of her years later as "a thick-bodied but withering spinster." But it is an aspect of the novel that leaves one unresolved difficulty. Yonadab meddled out of his hatred for the powerful self-deceivers placed above him, and his desire to assert his place in history in spite of them. But he seems to despise himself, as he speaks now, for something more than his actions: namely for his whole nature, and above all his inability to have any faith in finer human qualities. Is he then impugning the insights that his narrative offers, even as he speaks? Are we to assume

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that his whole story, superbly intelligent though it is, is nevertheless vitiated by these limitations of his personality? Or are we, on the contrary, to challenge his own self-rebukes, and insist that in fact his kind of scepticism was an instrument of truth that we are now benefiting from? After all, his wickedness seems in the last resort to have been a minor affair, scarcely enough to justify the anguished last line of the book—"For God's sake, turn the page." Is he still, out of that desire for a place in history, exaggerating his crimes? Perhaps Jacobson intends us to ask all these questions, perhaps this is the final uncertainty in a book rich in the drawing out of ambiguities? That thought does not quite dispel a still further doubt whether the author has quite settled these questions for himself.

ALL THE SAME, with *The Rape of Tamar*, Dan Jacobson establishes a place among the best of living imaginative writers in English. With *Bech: A Book*³ alone, John Updike would not do so, though the volume is full of small delights. It is a collection of stories, all about a writer called Bech, with titles like those of Ted Hughes's *Crow* poems: "Bech Panics" ("Crow's Nerve Fails"), "Bech Swings?" ("Crow Improvises"). But Bech is only a jackdaw, flying about and picking up bright trifles. The first stories show him representing American culture on a visit to the Communist world, where he collects some excellent impressions, and claims fairly plausibly to have left a few good ones behind. In Russia his attempts to spend his blocked royalties make some inroads into the socialist conscience of Kate, his translator-escort: after he buys an astrakhan cap, "'Only a *boyar*', said Kate, excited to flirtation by his purchase, 'would wear such a wow of a hat.'" In Rumania he watches a cabaret in which the stripping girls come one after the other from all the socialist nations, ending up with five in beige bikinis from Outer Mongolia. In England, the behaviour and language his tourist's eye has to report are less novel for us, and as a personality Bech is an uninteresting vacillator. Updike confessedly has his eye, in portraying him, on the heroes of other obvious contemporary American novelists: but passages describing Bech's itches and *angst* that try to rise to parody often sink again into mere borrowing. When not actually observing, Bech is at his best when just joking pleasantly.

³ *Bech: A Book*. By JOHN UPDIKE. André Deutsch, £1.50.

POLAND DOES NOT FIGURE in Bech's East European travels, but even if it had, Bech would never have seen anything of what is revealed in Jerzy Andrzejewski's *The Appeal*.⁴ Andrzejewski is best known outside Poland through the film *Ashes and Diamonds*, which was based on an earlier novel of his. *The Appeal* did not find a publisher in Poland, though its author still lives there: in the Polish, it was first published in Paris in 1968.

It is a short book, about a man in a mental hospital in a quiet city on the Vistula: Marian Konieczny, a 41-year-old meat-technologist, who believes that he is being watched by 30,000 intelligence agents and an Electronic Brain. Encouraged by the director of the clinic, he writes a letter to the First Secretary of the Polish United Workers' Party, stating his innocence and appealing for public rehabilitation, since he is also convinced that "they at the top know nothing about my misfortune, those devils from the Counter-Intelligence must certainly hide their tricks from them." Except to the extent that he has succumbed to specific delusions, he recalls clearly and thinks clearly: other self-deceptions that he displays are not of the kind that get called madness. His letter, which takes up the greater part of the book, slowly reveals the strains he has been subject to, important facts suddenly surfacing among the trivialities without Konieczny being very aware of the difference: how he was beaten up by the *Gestapo* at 17; how five years after that he yielded to the argument that it was morally proper not to speak up for his girl-friend, when it was discovered that her brothers were "forest bandits" fighting against People's Poland. Then in the same slow way it begins to seep into the reader's awareness that Konieczny

himself had grown up into a cold, suspicious man, a martinet and bully, keenly spying on the people working under him, in the name of patriotism and justice. His language—and this comes over more clearly in the Polish than in the English translation—is the language of a vain conformist, an eager repeater of slogans, a wielder of half-baked moral arguments backed with the force of authority.

A simple man, he has come to maturity in a world where a virulent passion for justice has prevailed—and has led him, like so many others, into evil. Konieczny, through some revulsion of the spirit, has gone a step further, into madness. Others—perhaps most—may still escape: the book is not by any means a wholly unfavourable picture of present-day Poland, the clinic with its kindly if irascible director coming over, for instance, as a first-class institution of its kind. But for Konieczny himself it is too late. The hoped-for letter, delicately-worded, comes from the First Secretary: but Konieczny is no longer capable of believing in its authenticity. We last see him slowly, comfortlessly sobbing, a sobbing that will not end.

CREEZY⁵ is a bit of rather disreputable illusionism. It claims to be a portrait of an ultra-*nouvelle* girl: a model with her "golden profile" on every hoarding, flying constantly from capital to capital, living in the most expensive of contemporary apartments—yet at heart the inhabitant of a "bare, arid world." The narrator, a married French *député*, has an affair with her, and does everything to persuade us that, though gorgeous, she is hardly human. But in spite of all the soulless landscapes in which the author and the narrator together place her, we are not so persuaded. It is palpably a mere excuse to let the narrator treat her badly before going back to his health-giving family, and to let the author raise no objection to his doing that. *Creezy* won the Prix Goncourt. If I may put it so, give me the Booker Prize any time.

⁴ *The Appeal*. By JERZY ANDRZEJEWSKI. Translated by CELINA WIENIEWSKA. Weidenfeld & Nicolson, £1.50.

⁵ *Creezy*. By FELICIEN MARCEAU. Translated by J. A. UNDERWOOD. Calder & Boyars, £1.50.

AUTHORS & CRITICS

Going Nowhere

A Reply to Raymond Fletcher

By Peregrine Worsthorne

CAUSES GROW OUT OF great questions, asserts Raymond Fletcher in his fascinating and challenging article about the future of British socialism ["Where Do We Go From Here?" ENCOUNTER, December]. I am not at all sure that this is true. But it is certainly a comforting notion at any rate for journalists, who are much better at asking the great questions than supplying the great answers. I have just completed a book which asks what I believe to be a central question about the future of British socialism. Can it work without an authoritative socialist governing class?

How to produce an authoritative governing class is the root question which faces any political system. The rulers have to convince the ruled that their power, privilege, and prosperity are legitimate, *i.e.* justifiable. This means that the rulers have to convince the ruled that those on top deserve to be there. British socialists in the past have tended to overlook the intractable nature of this problem. They have made two assumptions, both of which are turning out to be false. In the first place, they have assumed that in a socialist society the rulers would not need to possess themselves of power and privilege and property, and because of this, would not need to justify their possession of these envy-producing pos-

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The two articles by Mr Raymond Fletcher, Labour M.P. for Ilkeston, Derbyshire, were: "What Has Gone Wrong?" (November 1969) and "Where Do We Go from Here?" (December 1970).

sessions. Or at any rate, they would possess them in such relatively small quantities that the degree of justification required would be much smaller than under any previous system.

Secondly, they have assumed that such privileges for top socialists as may be necessary will be easy enough to justify because they will be so manifestly serving the cause of social justice.

It seems to me incontrovertibly obvious that neither of these assumptions has worked out in practice in the way intended, or can any longer be expected to do so. There is no longer any genuine intention on the part of the Labour Party so to iron out differentials as to create anything that can meaningfully be called an egalitarian society. The Labour Party has accepted the inevitability of economic incentives. This may be the fault of having to operate a mixed economy which is in turn the fault of having to operate a democratic political system. But that is not the point. The point is that there is no escaping this necessity. For the foreseeable future, those in positions of authority—political, bureaucratic, industrial, etc.—are going to enjoy a measure of power, privilege, and property on a scale that will certainly require justification.

But how can it be justified? The classical answer, of course, is that socialist power, privilege, and property will be so self-evidently in the interest of all that nobody will cavil at those who possess them. In other words, it will be a legitimate ruling order based on its success in running a just society. Its authority would rest on its performance. But is performance ever a secure enough base on which to rest the authority of any system? Can it be supposed that a socialist system, in the real world, will always be seen to deliver the goods of social justice so regularly and in such profusion as to guarantee its authority on, so to speak, its record? Is it realistic to suppose that a socialist system will always fulfil its aims so successfully that those on top will be able to justify their position by pointing to their unquestionable and unchallengeable good works?

Of course not. A socialist system will have its good years and its bad ones like any other system. Sometimes its rulers will do well and sometimes badly. But what is there to sustain the authority of a socialist governing order in the bad periods?

IN THEORY THE ANSWER should be its inherent virtue: that its values are shared by the public who understand how difficult it is to work them

out in practice. It seems to me that this hope is wildly fanciful. I just do not believe that any socialist society will live up to its ideals sufficiently to seem to justify the degree of power, privilege, and property that its rulers will seek to claim. This may happen for short periods, as it did in this country between, say 1945-50, when giant strides were made towards the goal of social justice. But normally the strides forward will not be giant. They may not even be strides forward at all, but backward, as happened in 1964-70. At such times, at any rate in a free society, the degree of criticism will be such as to discredit socialism, at least to the extent of calling into question the legitimacy of those who are seeking to operate it.

NO REALISTIC ASSESSMENT of the future of socialism in this country can be made without grasping the significance of this point. It has two aspects. The first is that those at the top of a democratic socialist society will require—if they are to operate a mixed economy—much more power, privilege and property than the classical theory allowed for and the second is that, except for rare periods, their performance in realising the goals of social justice will seldom be so incontrovertible as to make this trend acceptable. It follows from this that the legitimacy of the socialist governing order will be as vulnerable as the legitimacy of the capitalist system, and for much the same reasons.

Capitalism, like socialism, could hope to present an ethical face in its early stages. Its practitioners could claim with some justification to be operating according to values that command respect. Those 19th-century and early 20th-century entrepreneurs who transformed the face of the Western world were manifestly true to the ideals which they espoused. They were thrifty, hard-working, sober, dependable, and so on and so on. No one could question that they lived up to the Puritan ethic, which seemed for a time to be fulfilling the purpose which it set out to fulfil.

For a time, therefore, the capitalist governing class could properly be described as legitimate, in the sense that it seemed to be operating in a moral context. Not only was it materially viable. It was also morally viable. Its moral viability enabled it to survive intact even when its material performance left much to be desired. It is in trouble today not primarily because of its material failure, but because, in the higher reaches of corporate life, it is no longer true to its moral ethic. It is very

difficult to believe, for example, that in contemporary capitalist America the distribution of power, privilege, and property any longer has much to do with the virtues of thrift, sobriety, hard work, etc., that is to say with the Puritan ethic. This may be true still on the lower rungs of the capitalist ladder, in the small family firms, for example; but on the higher corporate levels, power, privilege and property seem to accord with no moral pattern whatsoever. Efficiency is now the criterion for the promotion and success of organisation man—a quality that has no moral content, and far from inspiring moral respect tends on the contrary to repel and disgust. This is the canker at the root of contemporary capitalism, not its material ineffectiveness but its moral emptiness.

BUT THE SAME CHARGE can be made against contemporary socialism. It was not primarily its lack of material performance that damned Labour in 1964-70. Much more significant was its moral emptiness, its inability to lend the system any ethical coherence or meaning. The distribution of power, property, and privilege did not seem to be according to any ethically viable pattern. Socialist organisation man seems as far removed from the ideal of socialism, as little to do with virtue as understood by the socialist ethic, as capitalist organisation man is from the puritan ethic. Workers in the public sector, for example, find it as difficult to discern socialist virtue in their chairmen as workers in the private sector do to find capitalist virtue in theirs.

This, in my view, raises the most profound question facing socialism today. The facts of technological life require a hierarchical structure—that is to say, an unequal distribution of power, privilege and property. So much socialists admit. But what are the moral values that determine this unequal distribution? Capitalism in its heyday could boast a moral explanation in terms of the Puritan ethic. There was a genuine correlation between capitalist power, privilege and property and conformity with moral virtue as then understood. But where is the correlation between socialist power, privilege, and property and moral virtue as now understood?

Let us take such leading luminaries in the 1964-70 socialist pantheon as Lord Robens, chairman of the Coal Board, Lord Melchett, chairman of the Steel Corporation, Aubrey Jones, Prices and Incomes Board chairman, or Arnold Weinstock, Lew Grade or virtually anybody else—David Frost, if you like—who made good during the Labour years. What

moral meaning can be discerned in their success? The truth is that the socialist power élite not only proved itself inefficient in practical performance, but peculiarly deficient in any kind of moral apologia. They were, even more than their capitalist predecessors, accidental beneficiaries of chance, skilled practitioners, perhaps, of certain crafts, but certainly moral exemplars of nothing.

I would argue that both American capitalism and British socialism are today equally devoid of moral content: equally unable to legitimise a governing order. By this I mean that the two systems, or a combination of each—such as we have in this country—fails to relate their power structure, and the distribution of property and privilege, to any moral pattern that accords with what people feel to be their own moral values. People, therefore, see no justice in it. And since it appears arbitrary, accidental, morally meaningless, it lacks authority, is, in a word, illegitimate.

WHAT FASCINATES ME is the total failure today of socialist theorists to come to terms with this problem. They do not seem to see that if authority in a socialist society rests on manifest progress being made towards social justice, then it rests on a highly shaky base. No governing order in a democratic society can possibly survive intact such a criterion, since there are bound to be many periods when social justice is not being realised. Early socialist theorists tended to underestimate this difficulty, because they totally overlooked the extent to which intellectuals are natural critics of all systems. It was assumed that the corrosive attention of the intellectual community which had done so much to undermine capitalism—by pointing out its faults and the gap between its promise and performance, etc.—would never be turned against a socialist system. How wrong they were, as Mr Harold Wilson would be the first to testify. What the Wilson years in Britain made absolutely clear is that in practice the intellectuals will be as subversive of socialism as of capitalism, constantly and relentlessly emphasising the gap between ideal and reality.

The point I am trying to make is that British democratic socialism's attitude to the problem of authority is dangerously unrealistic in contemporary circumstances, rather in the same way as American capitalism's attitude is as well. Both American capitalism and British socialism have failed to realise that in contemporary circumstances the principle on which the distribution of power, privilege, and property is based in each system is no longer viable. The American public finds it increas-

ingly difficult to discern any moral pattern, because the capitalist virtues, that is to say, the Puritan ethic, seem to be less and less obviously relevant. The same can be said, however, about the principle behind the socialist distribution of power, privilege and property in Britain. It no longer corresponds to the socialist ethic.

Capitalism, however, has a fall-back position, which socialism singularly lacks. It can be argued in defence of capitalism that it never truly envisaged a moral basis of authority. Irving Kristol makes this point admirably in a recent issue of *The Public Interest*, when he quotes Hayek as arguing that the whole point about capitalism is that there is no damn merit about it. "It is interesting to note what Hayek is doing. He is opposing a free society to a just society—because while we know what freedom is, we have no generally accepted knowledge of what justice is." Kristol then goes on to quote Hayek as follows: "Since they [i.e. differentials in wealth and income] are not the effect of anyone's design or intentions, it is meaningless to describe the manner in which the market distributed the good things of this world among particular people as just or unjust . . ."

BUT AT LEAST, as I say, American capitalism has a fall-back intellectual position and plenty of able exponents of it, like Hayek and Milton Friedman. But British socialism stands or falls on faith in its moral content, and if this slackens, then those who are operating it, those who have their hands on the levers of power and privilege, have no conceivable justification. Yet it has slackened, as it was bound to do. Just as the moral inspiration of American capitalism could only last in certain conditions—when there was an open continent to exploit and genuine opportunity for the capitalist virtues to show themselves at their best—so the moral inspiration of British socialism could only last in conditions when the reforms needed were of a kind that lent themselves to messianic solutions. How can those who wield socialist power and enjoy socialist privilege today in Britain present themselves as moral crusaders any more than those who wield capitalist power and enjoy capitalist privilege in America can present themselves as merchant adventurers? In each case the moral justification has lost its glamour, lost its moral relevance.

BUT THIS BRINGS ME to my central point: the need to start thinking about the problem of authority at a far deeper level than has been

customary either in the American capitalist or the British socialist systems. What has to be realised is that both systems have grossly oversimplified the problem, since each has relied on a governing order enjoying easy moral approbation; on a governing order whose authority would be relatively easy to justify. But this has allowed the key question of politics to be begged, the key question being how to maintain authority when the privilege and property that go with power are very hard to justify, when moral approval is desperately difficult to elicit. For the first time, the two systems are being frontally and unavoidably brought up against the problem of, in a word, leadership.

For both this is a new problem, requiring reappraisals of the most fundamental kind, particularly on the key issue of equality which is such a crucial one for both systems. For the truth has to be faced that any system giving serious consideration to the problem of leadership cannot overlook the crucial insights to be obtained in the theory of aristocracy. What has to be recognised is that if the pedestal of moral purpose is rendered less secure; if those at the top of society cannot rely for their authority and legitimacy on their conformity to some generally accepted moral pattern, then they need to be far more outstanding in themselves, individually and collectively; need to be able to command respect and loyalty less by reason of their similarity to those whom they govern, than by reason of their striking and impressive superiority. What I am seeking to suggest is that because a socialist society is going to be much less equal than was assumed, and much less incontrovertibly just, the authority of those on top, if it is to be voluntarily acceptable, will need to be buttressed by social magnetism. Socialism in the past has seen its function as being to cut leaders down to size, to destroy a class system designed to make the exercise of authority easy and natural. It has seen the aristocratic virtues as the enemy of socialism.

The conclusion I reach in my book is that socialism desperately needs to build its leaders up to size, to enable them to develop an authority that does not exclusively depend on what they do for those underneath—which will never seem enough—but which depends also on what they are in themselves.

In aristocratic societies [Tocqueville wrote] the class that gives the tone to opinion and has the guidance of affairs, being permanently and hereditarily placed above the multitude, naturally conceives a lofty idea of itself and man. It loves to invent for him noble pleasures, to carve out splendid objects for his ambition.

It seems to me that British socialism, no less than American capitalism, has got to pay far more attention to the problem of allowing, indeed encouraging, those on top to conceive a lofty idea of themselves in precisely this aristocratic sense.

RAYMOND FLETCHER'S essential short-coming as exhibited in his two important ENCOUNTER articles is this: The point of departure must be not so much to consider why one particular Labour Government failed, but why no Labour Government is ever likely to succeed. The fundamental point is, very simply, that democratic socialism is a contradictory combination of a political theory that needs giants to operate it, and a social theory that produces only pygmies; of a political theory that requires rulers of unprecedented authority, and a social theory that produces rulers of unparalleled lack of authority; of a political theory which, because it elevates the power of the State, requires a ready supply of statesmen, and a social theory which refuses to tolerate conditions in which statesmen are likely to emerge.

It is easy enough to understand how this contradiction arose: from the socialist belief that the problems of government spring from the evils of capitalism and will largely disappear once these are remedied. In the resulting millennium, the people would find it relatively easy to govern themselves. Hierarchy, therefore, the whole purpose of which is to facilitate the exercise of power, would become less and less necessary. Equality was not only morally desirable; it was also logical and practical, since rank and privilege, previously defended as the twin buttresses of authority, would plainly no longer serve any necessary purpose.

What is now beginning to become clear is that far from socialism simplifying the problems of Government, it enormously complicates them: far from it being a system in which rulers could safely be cut down to size, it is a system that desperately needs them to be built up to size; far from it being a political system whereby the need for social hierarchy vanishes, it is a political system where the need for social hierarchy is vastly augmented. Far, therefore, from socialism rendering inequality increasingly unnecessary it renders such an ideal increasingly illusory.

This, in my view, is the central conclusion that emerges from any realistic study of the Wilson years; that the post-capitalist society presents political problems for which "the

People" supply no answer, problems which cannot be solved by reference to the "General Will", since none exists. In no field was this so obviously apparent as in economic management. Instead of "the People" supporting the Socialist Government in the measures it deemed essential, they barred its freedom of action at every turn. It was not, primarily, capitalist vested interests that made socialist economic management so difficult. The primary opposition came from the workers themselves; from the very element, that is, on which socialism had hoped to be able to rely.

I do not believe that anyone, realistically examining the experience of the Wilson years, can conclude that the problems facing the government were due primarily to the evils of capitalism. What has to be recognised is that they were due primarily to what were hoped to be the virtues of socialism, to the increased power socialism accords to the working class. Doctrinaire socialists may like to hoodwink themselves that all would have been different in a purely socialist economy, and that the recalcitrance of the workers was due, not to the dawn of socialism, but to the dusk of capitalism. But Ministers, who experienced the difficulties, know what nonsense this is. Their difficulties were, in a true sense, socialist difficulties; difficulties which are likely to get worse rather than better the more socialist Britain becomes.

IS IT NOT TIME THAT socialists recognised this truth? That operating a rationally planned economy, aimed at social justice for all, is going to involve measures that the working class are likely to oppose, and that this necessity is not just a passing phase, due to the remaining sins of capitalism, but is a permanent condition that has got to be lived with. Socialism, in other words, is not going to prove a form of society that minimises the problem of politics by creating a clear "general will", based on a cohesive and loyal working class, which government can simply follow. It is going to prove a form of society that maximises the problems of politics, since by enlarging the power of the working class it enlarges the power of precisely that element which is most certain to oppose rational planning. Governmental *authority*, in short, does not become less important under socialism, as it was supposed to do, but immensely more important, since having weakened the disciplines of the market, without winning the voluntary acquiescence of the workers, more and more depends on the skilful exercise of political power.

What cannot be emphasised too strongly, however, is that democratic socialism made no allowance in its thinking for this development. It assumed that it would be possible to weaken the authority of the top of society precisely because the bottom would have become so much more amenable; it assumed that the rulers would be undermined because the ruled would no longer need to be ruled; assumed, in short, that the traditional Tory idea of consensus percolating downwards, from the top to the bottom, could be reversed, with the working class making its will manifest from the base of society upwards. These assumptions are absolutely crucial to the theory of democratic socialism, since they form the foundation for its faith in the practicality of egalitarianism. The necessity for a governing order was seen to rest on the evils of capitalist exploitation. Remedy that defect, and the working class would govern itself, with the assistance of expert administrators who would simply have the specialist skills necessary to give effect to popular desires.

SURELY THE WILSON YEARS have shown that this picture bears no relation to reality. Far from socialism diminishing the need for political leadership, it vastly accentuates it. Socialism has had the effect of firing the passion for social justice, without supplying the fuel which was meant to feed the furnace. The fuel was meant to be working-class enthusiasm. A forced consensus based on the greed and selfishness of a ruling class was to be replaced by a voluntary consensus based on the public-spirited patriotism of the working class. Is it not clear today, however, after the experience of the Wilson years, that social justice cannot be built on this mythical base? Is it not clear that if the ideal is to be realised a very much more authoritative governing order will be required than anything dreamt of in the philosophy of democratic socialism? Is it not clear that the driving force of democratic socialism, absolutely contrary to what was assumed, will have to come from the top of society rather than from the bottom?

THIS I BELIEVE, is the inescapable lesson of the Wilson years. Socialism is too important a crusade to be left to the socialists, social justice too grandiose an ideal to be left to the egalitarians. The paradox at the heart of contemporary politics is that rational planning in the interests of social justice will require that the utmost attention be given to *Tory* rather than to socialist politi-

cal insights; to Tory insights which have to do with the maintenance of conditions conducive of an authoritative governing order rather than socialist insights which have to do with their elimination. The battle for socialism will be won, not on the playing fields of comprehensive schools, but on the playing fields of Eton, not by undermining the confidence of the old ruling class, but by harnessing its political skills to the socialist cause, not by depriving the successful of the hallmarks of distinctive superiority, but in facilitating their re-emergence; not by reducing differentials in wealth and property but in putting them to the prime social purpose of developing a responsible and impressive governing class.

None of this, of course, is acceptable to the Labour party, the origins of which are so deeply rooted in attitudes which take working-class benevolence for granted. But this benevolence is what the Wilson years suggest cannot be taken for granted. Herein lies the Labour Party's tragedy. It banked on a vast credit balance in the bank of public opinion as the working class grew in power and influence, but when Mr Wilson tried to draw on the balance he found it was in the red. The working class proved itself no more willing to cooperate with rational socialist planning, determined by a Labour Government, than with rational capitalist planning determined by the market. Indeed, there were more strikes under Labour than under the Tories. The trade union movement moved further into opposition under Labour than it did under the Tories.

WHAT THE LABOUR PARTY find so difficult to understand is that industrial bloody-mindedness is not a consequence of capitalism, but a consequence of *industrialism* itself. Heaping coal into a blast furnace day after day, or pressing a button or pulling a lever or servicing a conveyor belt are not activities that provide much excitement or satisfaction. Socialism does not transform them; it merely guarantees that the resulting frustration is increasingly blamed on government rather than on the employers. Factory-floor agitation, after all, is one of the few active pleasures which an industrial society provides for its less well-endowed members and it is by no means certain that any amount of material affluence can altogether compensate for the thrills and tension of a really major industrial stoppage; all the more thrilling and tense for those concerned, obviously, if it is unofficial, with the

decisions being taken, not in some remote union head office but actually on the shop floor.

Professional people get their kicks and uplift in a host of different ways. The barrister enjoys his moment of high drama in court; the journalist when on to a big story; the financier when about to close a big deal, and so on. Their working lives offer moments rich in drama and fulfilment. When an official strike leader comes out of the negotiating room and gives the thumbs down sign to his followers, he sees himself as the hero in a great tradition, marching in the footsteps of Keir Hardie and Ben Tillett, rather as the young barrister, for example, scoring a legalistic point over opposing counsel, sees himself in the great tradition of F. E. Smith or Norman Birkett. No wonder he looks happy. For once in his life he is doing something that makes him feel six-foot high. It is not every day that working people hit the headlines, enjoy the heady experience of being in the news, see themselves on television, get singled out for *Daily Mirror* attention.

Being a responsible worker or a responsible trade unionist is exceedingly tedious and soul-destroying, and no less so under socialism than under capitalism. Responsibility means little more than being a willing cog in increasingly large and impersonal machines, whether they be industrial combines or massive trade unions. For the middle class, as much under socialism as under capitalism, responsibility is the path leading to power and glory. For working people it is a polite euphemism for compliance and subjection. It always seemed to me one of the more idiotic socialist assumptions that, given British working-class traditions, the increased affluence of the working class would lead to a more cooperative approach. It was bound to lead to the opposite since for the first time the working class can afford to be irresponsible. In so far as socialism has played a part in bringing security into working-class lives, to that extent it has guaranteed greater opportunity for bloody-mindedness. Entrepreneurial enterprise on the part of management may have been stamped out—or bribed out—by the encroachments of socialism. But the socialists have been far less successful in killing off its equivalent among the more enterprising members of the working class. And the irony is that the more progress is made towards improving the material conditions of the workers, the more bloody-minded they can afford to be. In this sense, bless it, the Labour Party is fashioning for itself less a cushion on which to lie than a stick for its back to be beaten with.

AND IT IS A STICK, as I say, which will become thicker and heavier the more socialism succeeds. I do not deplore this. An irresponsible working class is essential to a healthy industrial democracy. Paradoxically enough, irresponsibility among the workers is a sign of their *embourgeoisement* because it is a sign of vitality and independence. But for democratic socialism it is a sign of much else besides. It is a sign of the impracticability of relying on the working class as the firm base on which to build democratic socialism. Yet the Labour Party does so rely. The result is weak and tentative Government that dare not stamp its foot, so conscious is it that nothing solid lies below.

Nor are the new power élites, the meritocracy based on brain-power, much more helpful. Fashioned in the mould of an ideology deeply unsympathetic to the problems of democratic government, they compound the malaise rather than cure it. Not only, therefore, is the cause of democratic socialism unable to rely on a consensus rooted in working-class loyalty, on a firm base at the bottom of society, but neither is there a reliable consensus percolating down from the top. Indeed the effect of socialism is to provoke both the top and the bottom of society, the working class and the meritocracy, brain power and brawn power. I see no way out of this dilemma, except for the Labour Party to change its fundamental character. To some extent, under the pressure of office, this is what the Labour Government actually did, becoming in many ways more Tory than the Tories. But this raises the fundamental question: is it desirable for Britain in present circumstances to have two Tory Parties, two natural governing parties?

This bring me, in conclusion to a final point. The Wilson years proved two things. They proved how difficult it is for Labour to govern effectively; but they also proved something else: how difficult it is for the Tory Party to oppose effectively. They taught us the disadvantages of having Labour *in* office. But they also taught us the dangers of having Labour *out* of Opposition. It always seemed to me that the strongest argument for getting the Tories back to power was not so much to get Mr Heath and his colleagues into Downing Street—beneficial as that may still prove to be—but to get Mr Wilson and his colleagues back in to the job of giving a proper political outlet to all the discontents at present erupting in non-political forms.

This is the job of an Opposition party: to draw disaffection into its orbit, to articulate dissent, to give expression in an orderly manner to all those aspirations, fears and suspicions which, unless constitutionally canalised, run riot on the streets, or on the shop floor and campuses. It should be like a flame whose burning brightness attracts troublesome moths and midges, wasps and hornets, gathers them around it, so as to spare the body politic from their separate depredations.

Throughout this century the Labour Party has beautifully fulfilled this essential role, has been the focus and inspiration of discontent, never in office long enough for the flame to lose its brightness, or the moths and midges, wasps and hornets, to scatter and annoy at random. Until Mr Wilson. For during the years 1964-70 Mr Wilson was at pains to play down this historic Labour role, to dim the flame. He sought to present the Labour Party as staid and solid, more reassuring than rumbustious, turning it—or that was the intention—from a party of protest to a party of government. The result was that those who used to place their trust in Labour have turned elsewhere for succour, outside Parliament, outside the constitutional order.

THIS WAS BOUND to happen. For when Labour is in office, and behaving as if it felt at home there, discontent is deprived of any proper outlet. In name, of course, the Tories become the Opposition, go through the constitutional motions of being “agin the Government”. But in a mass democracy, this is far from being enough. It was enough in the 18th and 19th centuries, when politics were intended to reflect the limited differences of view of a ruling class. In those days the governing party were the ruling “ins” and the opposition party were the ruling “outs”. But today the role of opposition is infinitely more complex. It has to be able to embrace a radical disaffection that yearns for changes that go far beyond swapping the reins of power from one set of similar hands to another. During the Wilson Government, in this deeper sense, Britain lacked an Opposition. Disaffection, therefore, lacked a political focus.

In 1964, when this process began—the direction, of course, was set by Hugh Gaitskell and only carried through by Harold Wilson—certain optimistic assumptions were being made about the state of industrial or post-industrial society. The End of Ideology had been proclaimed. The class war was thought to be over. Henceforth social peace would reign, and

what would be the point of a militant Labour Party in an era of tranquillity? Such prognostications have proved tragically false.

True, some of the old tensions have passed away, but others have come flooding in to take their place. Industrial strife is taking new forms, a new kind of radicalism in the shape of student power has risen, social troubles have been introduced—whole fresh areas of potential disaffection have begun to unfold, just at the very moment when the Party which historically existed to embrace and articulate such pressures decided to change its role, wrongly believing that a party of protest was no longer needed. But of course it is needed, desperately needed. Take, for example, the problem of trade union disorder. So long as working-class militants saw the Labour Party as a sharp instrument whose cutting edge was intended to carve them a bigger slice of the capitalist cake, they were prepared to agitate within and through the Labour Party. But Mr Wilson sought to blunt that edge, even to turn it against the unions. He did not succeed, but not for want of trying. Nothing would have pleased him more than to be able to rid the Labour Party of its notorious pro-trade union bias, which so puts off the middle-class voter. Can we wonder, therefore, that militant trade unionism, seeing its traditional outlet for political radicalism blocked, increasingly turned to industrial disruption on the shop floor.

The same phenomenon is seen in the whole protest industry. Out of office, while in Opposition, the Labour Party used to take the lead in expressing indignation about all the subjects which in the Wilson years provoked violent protest. The effect of office, however, was to mute the voice of the Labour Party, and as its voice was muted so did the stridency of non-political protest increase in volume, responsibility for protests passing out of the hands of the elected representatives into those of agitators and demagogues.

That is why the return of Labour to Opposition could prove so significant. A Tory Government bent on emphasising law and order, and a Labour Opposition back in its proper role of articulating dissent—such a combination could restore relevance to the political battlefield, so that these great new issues can be fought out in Parliament, where they belong, instead of running riot in the streets. Of course, the country needs the smack of firm government. But it also needs, just as badly, the uplift of passionate opposition. The hope at least is that the last election will have led to both.

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Cesare Pavese's "Nudism." will appear in a volume of his stories, *Told in Confidence*, translated by A. E. Murch, to be published this spring by Peter Owen Pavese, who was born in Piedmont in 1908, committed suicide in 1951. . . .

Wilfred Sheed writes: "... Born in London, 1930. Parents: Frank Sheed, publisher, and Maisie Ward, biographer (Chesterton, Browning, etc.). Transatlantic education, useful but confusing. M.A., Lincoln Coll. Oxon, modern history. . . . Novels—*A Middle Class Education*, *The Hack*, *Square's Progress*, *Office Politics* (American National Book Award nominee), *The Blacking Factory*, and this year *Max Jamison* (just published in Britain as *The Critic* by Weidenfeld & Nicolson). . . ."

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POINTS OF THE COMPASS

Letter from Tel Aviv

Who's a Jew, and Other Woes

By Amnon Rubinstein

THE TIMING could not have been worse—Israel still fighting a frontier war—but the contenders could not have been better picked. On the one side, the Shalit family: he, a clean-cut Sabra, a psychologist serving as a lieutenant-commander in the Israeli Navy; she, Anne, non-Jewish grand-daughter to Sir Patrick Geddes, Scotsman and Zionist, who collaborated with Chaim Weizmann in establishing the Hebrew University on Mount Scopus; their children, a son Oren and a daughter Galia, indistinguishable from other Israeli toddlers and blissfully unaware of the campaign being waged in their name. On the other side stood Israel's religious establishment, anxious to prevent any erosion of the traditional concept of Judaism, and armed with the threat of political crisis which had been so effectively used in the past. The issue was seemingly inconsequential: could the Shalit children, though not Jewish from a religious point of view, be registered as Jews? Battle was joined in the Supreme Court of Israel, and its aftermath produced a political storm which, for a time, muffled the sounds of the war being fought along the borders.

As legal battles go, the Shalit case was ostensibly marginal. Israeli Law requires all permanent residents to be registered with the Ministry of Interior. Under the Population Registration Law, registration includes two controversial items—*leom* and religion. *Leom* is an untranslatable term which was probably derived from Central and Eastern Europe. It means something akin to "peoplehood"¹ and desig-

nates a common ethnic, cultural, and linguistic origin. The Shalit family wanted to have the children registered as having no religion—as they are entitled to do—but insisted on their being registered as Jews under *leom*. The Ministry of Interior refused to register them as Jews and suggested that the item *leom* be left blank. Registration, as such, does not confer any benefit upon the persons registered, nor does it alter their legal status in any way. It means nothing beyond the fact of registration.

The Supreme Court reiterated its view that registration was introduced merely for the sake of administrative efficiency and in order to collect statistical data. Under Israeli Constitutional Law discrimination on grounds of race, religion, or ethnic origin is forbidden. As a matter of principle, the definition of an Israeli as a Jew or non-Jew has no bearing on his rights and duties. To this rule there are two exceptions. First, under the Law of Return, Jews are entitled to immigrate to Israel and acquire, automatically, Israeli citizenship.² Secondly, as a general rule, only members of religious communities can marry and divorce inside Israel; Israeli law has inherited from the Mandatory régime a modified form of the

¹ The German *Nationalität* signifies both nationality in the English sense and an equivalent of *leom*. The term was evolved in the 19th century and applied in the multi-ethnic countries of Central Europe as defining a distinct group with a cultural, linguistic, and ethnic links. Towards the end of the 19th century (and especially after the end of World War I), some Jewish organisations attempted to apply this term to the Jewish minorities in Europe. The term is still used nowadays in East European countries, such as the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, where it is usually translated into English as "nationality." In the Constitution of Cyprus, the equivalent term is "community." See Article 2 of the Constitution of Cyprus: "For the purposes of this Constitution: (1) the Greek Community comprises all citizens of the Republic who are of Greek origin and whose mother tongue is Greek or who share the Greek cultural traditions or who are members of the Greek-Orthodox Church; (2) the Turkish Community comprises all citizens of the Republic who are of Turkish origin and whose mother tongue is Turkish or who share the Turkish cultural traditions or who are Moslems."

² Contrary to common allegations, Israel has not broken international concepts of equality. Nor is the Israeli law unique. The Federal Republic of Germany has a similar law—section 116 of the Constitution—in which only refugees of "German origin" are given automatic citizenship. The Israeli and German laws are consonant with Article 1 (3) of the *International Convention for the Prevention of All Forms of Racial Discrimination*, which excludes immigration and naturalisation from the treaty, provided there is no discrimination "against any particular nationality."

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Ottoman *millet* system. Under this system, each religious community has jurisdiction in matters of marriage and divorce.³

In the Shalit case, both these issues were irrelevant. The Law of Return was not invoked as all the Shalits were Israeli citizens—Anne Shalit by naturalisation, the father and children by birth. Neither was the personal status of the children in issue. Even if registered as Jews under *leom*, the children would not come under the jurisdiction of the Rabbinical courts. The definition of Jew (or Moslem) for the purposes of jurisdiction in matters of marriage and divorce must be supplied by the religious law applicable in the specific case. It would be an absurdity to force upon religious tribunals a secular concept of “who’s a Jew.” The Shalit children are thus excluded from religious jurisdiction no matter how registered, and, because of the *millet* system, would have no right of marriage inside Israel. Unless the law is altered by the time they grow up, they will have to go abroad—usually Cyprus—or find other solutions resorted to by Israelis who do not come, or do not wish to come, under religious jurisdiction.⁴

THUS THE ISSUE BEFORE THE COURT did not raise questions of legal rights but merely matters of form. Yet politically and ideologically, the very issue was of the highest importance. Can there be any other definition but the religious

for the term Jew? Is there such a person as a Jew by *leom* who is not a Jew in the traditional sense? And if so, who comes under this new category?

THE QUESTIONS were not only complex and laden with emotions but touched upon the pivotal issue of Israel’s character. Zionism sought to solve the Jewish problem by “normalising” the Jews. The Jewish people, or nation, has a unique status among nations. Jews are tied together by common experience and history with Judaism as a religion; but the very essence of political Zionism was that the religious aspect *could* be separated from the personality of the Jews as a nation. Without this separation, the whole concept of a secular Jewish state, which implies the existence of secular Judaism, would have been defeated. Zionism, by accepting the prevalent 19th-century ideas of liberal nationalism, gave secular Judaism a theoretical foundation. In a sense, political Zionism attempted to do on a national basis what Jews sought in vain to do individually, *i.e.* to be like all the other *Goyim*. (Significantly enough, *Goyim* in Hebrew denotes both non-Jews and other nations.)

Yet, “normalisation” was easier preached than practised. The uniqueness of Jewish existence is that secular, ethnic, religious and cultural elements are so inextricably intertwined that cutting them apart seems to be an almost impossible task. One of these complex issues relates to the very question of Jewish identity. The religious test, established in Talmudic times, is clear cut: one is a Jew only if born to a Jewish mother or converted to Judaism. For centuries this was the foundation stone of the very concept of the Jewish people. Judaism does not conform to the ordinary rules of nations and religions, and regards Jews as a group of people *sui generis*.⁵

The whole concept of Jewish identity, in its traditional sense, is founded upon the Covenant (*Brit*) between God and the Jewish people. This eternal Covenant (*Brit Olam*) explains the continuous identity which links the Jewish people of today with the Israelites of the Covenant, a continuity upon which the whole idea of the return to Zion is based.

It is this Covenant which unites belief with ethnic origin and which, because of its continuity, defines a Jew independently of his own personal belief. It is often alleged that, because of this unique attitude, Judaism has racial undertones: origin counts more than actual belief. Moreover, under Jewish law, a Jew cannot opt out and be rid of his Judaism by con-

³ This system does not give Judaism or the Jewish community any priority over other religious groups. On the contrary, because of its Ottoman origin, Israeli law, to this day, gives Moslem courts more authority and wider jurisdiction than to Jewish and Christian courts.

⁴ Such solutions include: marriage abroad or marriage by proxy in Mexico (later registered by the Ministry of Interior); an ordinary contract under which the parties undertake matrimonial obligations; and, finally, dispensing with marriage altogether. Israeli law is extremely favourable to the unmarried spouse. The Israeli version of the Common Law wife—the woman who is “publicly reputed to be known as the wife”—is entitled to all the benefits, including inheritance, accruing to a legally married wife. Under Israeli law there is no such thing as an illegitimate child, and all children are equally entitled to family rights. Thus the religious battles have proved to be self-defeating—by limiting the right to civil marriage they have weakened the legal institution of marriage.

⁵ Although the Jewish predicament is unique, the Greek tradition also unites nationality with religion. Under the Ottoman Empire, “Greek race and Greek Orthodox religion were absolutely inseparable in face of the Moslem Turk. No Greek would be considered a Greek after his conversion to Islam.” See: J. L. Talmon, “Who is a Jew?” *ENCOUNTER*, May 1965, p. 30. This aspect is also apparent in Article 2 of the Constitution of Cyprus quoted in note 1.

verting to another religion. In the view of orthodox Judaism a converted Jew, hated and despised as he may be, is nevertheless a Jew. Judaism, like some nationalities, is a club which one can join but from which none can escape.

Religious Jews hotly deny any allegation of racialism and point to the rules of conversion: Judaism does not encourage proselytes, but once accepted, any person, regardless of race and colour, becomes a Jew. Some of the great Jewish sages and Rabbis were converts or sons of converts. Nevertheless, to many secular Israelis, the rule itself is repugnant: it seems illogical, discriminatory, and impractical. It leads, as we shall see later, to absurd results when applied to a secular society such as Israel.

On the other hand, even some staunchly secular Israelis, who would fight religious coercion on other issues, accept the religious definition. For them the basic definition of "Who is a Jew" stands outside and above the line which divides the secular from the religious sector. It is the foundation upon which the House of Israel was built in the past; it has been venerated by the practice of generations and observed by Jewish communities throughout the world. Any departure from this basic definition would, according to this school, dilute the bond which unites Jews and would introduce an element of confusion where coherence is needed. Hannah Zemer, editor of the *Histadrut* daily *Davar*, gives expression to this view:

I want full and equal rights for all persons in Israel, regardless of race or religion, but I cannot understand how one can be a Jew if one is not recognised as such by Judaism. If one wants to become a Jew, he must do this in accordance with the rules of the community he wants to join.

The issue therefore looms over the periodical skirmishes between the secular and religious sectors.

ALTHOUGH THE QUESTION OF Jewish identity has occasionally disturbed Jewish communities in the Diaspora, it has acquired its magnitude in Israel. The ambivalent attitude of the early secular Zionists to their Jewish ancestry was apparent in two seemingly conflicting ideas. One was the return to the historical cradle of the nation; the other was that the Jews should acquire political independence in order to become a modern nation. Theodore Herzl himself symbolised this duality. He had only tenuous links with Judaism as a

religion, which consisted mainly of dim recollections of the Synagogue in Budapest. In his book *Judenstaat* (1896) he writes of "our Fathers' belief" and then goes on to advocate complete separation of State and Religion. In the *Yishuv*—the pre-State Jewish community in Palestine—anti-Jewish tendencies were not uncommon.

These tendencies reached their peak in the Canaanite Movement which, in the 1940s and early '50s, sought to divorce the native-born from the Jewish people overseas. For them, the local Jew had become a *Hebrew*, and distinct from the Diaspora Jew. They argued for total severance of ties between Hebrews and Jews and proclaimed war on the Zionist doctrine. The movement was miniscule—and its impact is insignificant nowadays—but in the forties it did express certain latent attitudes. The Canaanite creed did not grow *in vacuo*. In the *Yishuv*, the term Hebrew—denoting a native born—was widely used and "Jew" or "Jewish" became distinctly unpopular. The *Histadrut*, when formed, was called the *General Federation of Hebrew Workers*. Hebrew was the common adjective used to describe the *Yishuv's* Jew. The *Yishuv* itself was called *HaYishuv Ha'ivri*—the Hebrew *Yishuv*—and its younger generation was educated to regard itself as distinct and separate from the traditional Jew. Even in the Declaration of Independence, the distinction between Hebrew and Jew can be found. The Declaration calls upon the Arab people to cooperate with the "Hebrew people in its land," invokes the assistance of "Jewish people in the Diaspora" but finally proclaims the establishment of a "Jewish State."

INDEPENDENCE HAS ACCENTUATED the problem of Jewish identity. First, anti-Jewish attitudes prevalent before the Nazi holocaust were reversed. The War of Independence and the plight of the Jewish refugees clamouring to find refuge in Israel put the spotlight on the historical dimension of the Jewish predicament. Arab enmity has made Israel's dependence on the support of the Diaspora apparent to all. The ostensible gap between Israeli and Jew has gradually narrowed and the term "Hebrew", as denoting an Israeli Jew, has practically disappeared. Secondly, the term "Jew" was incorporated by the Knesset into the Law of Return, but the legislature intentionally failed to define the term; consequently a legal definition was bound to be debated and eventually litigated. At first, there was some hope that unpleasant disputes would be avoided. Without such disputes, Israel would have avoided not only

internal dissent but also the type of world-wide publicity it can do without. West Germany, with its similar law applicable to Germans, has avoided any discussion on "who's a German," so that only a few legal experts know of the existence of this law. Yet, given the Israeli temperament, and the endemic friction between secular and religious parties, any hope of avoiding a full-scale confrontation was bound to be frustrated.

FROM THE VERY START, the question has plagued successive Israeli governments. Mass immigration brought with it many mixed couples and children of non-Jewish mothers, and an official government policy had to be formulated. Ben Gurion has always been adamant in his refusal to accept the religious criteria. A showdown had to come. On 10 March 1958 the Minister of Interior, Israel Bar Yehuda, of the socialist *Ahdut Avodah* party (now incorporated into Labour) issued a directive under which any person who declares *bona fide* that he is a Jew and does not belong to another religion, is to be registered as a Jew. The cabinet, at Ben Gurion's instigation, approved the directive. Predictably, the religious parties left the Coalition and created a government crisis. Undaunted, Ben Gurion asked the Sephardi Rabbi of Tel-Aviv, Moshe Toledano, to become Minister of Religious Affairs—thus attempting to break the monopoly of the religious parties over religious matters. But the crisis went on. The Knesset debated the issue and finally—after a long and heated session, decided to appoint a Ministerial committee which would collect opinions of learned Jews in Israel and abroad, and then draft new directives.

On 27 October 1958 Ben Gurion sent a letter to 50 Jewish scholars, asking them for their opinion on the crucial question. Most of the scholars addressed were religious, but were not confined to the orthodox stream. Throughout 1959, the replies came in and when the answers were read, it was clear that the religious parties had won. Thirty-seven answers, out of 45 received, advocated the religious criteria: for any person not born of a Jewish mother, conversion was essential. There was disagreement as to the meaning of conversion—the non-Orthodox insisting that their ceremony was sufficient—but on the principle involved all agreed. Only three answers came out unequivocally for separation between the religious and national sense of the term Jew. Ben Gurion, swallowing this bitter pill, had to yield and on 1 January 1960 a new directive was issued:

A person shall be registered as a Jew by *leom* if (a) he is born to a Jewish mother and has no other religion or (b) he has been converted in accordance with *Halacha* [the Jewish canon law].

With these new directives, the religious parties celebrated their victory.

But to many Israelis the issue was not closed. They felt that the term "Jew" cannot have one single uniform definition. Sir Isaiah Berlin, one of the scholars who participated in that odd poll, echoed this feeling:

The word "Jew" has so far as I can tell, this narrower or tighter meaning as defined by *Halacha*—the son of a Jewess or a convert to Judaism; but equally it has a looser connotation in common speech. A Jew in this looser sense is anyone whom a normal person, acquainted with the customary use of the term, would, without too much reflection, describe as a Jew (just as a table is what most people agree to be a table, even though, for certain commercial or legal purposes the meaning of the word table may have to be artificially tightened up). In this normal sense we can speak of "atheistic Jews" without any sense of contradiction; for we should make a man to be a Jew, if he were in most respects identified with a Jewish community, despite the fact that his mother may be an unconverted non-Jewess, and that the rabbis may therefore quite correctly reject his claims to be a Jew in the religious-narrower-sense of the word. . . .

Strangely enough, this duality of the term Jew was eventually enunciated in a case involving a Carmelite monk—the famous Ruffeisen case.

OSWALD RUFFEISEN was born a Jew and suffered as a Jew in Nazi-occupied Poland. Later he converted to Catholicism and, under the name of Brother Daniel, joined the Carmelite order. He came to Israel, and entered a monastery on Mount Carmel. Brother Daniel, despite his conversion, regarded himself as a member of the Jewish people who had merely acquired another religion. He was, in his words, a Catholic Jew and as such sought to be registered as a Jew by *leom* and to receive automatic citizenship as a Jew under the Law of Return. The Minister of Interior, acting upon the 1960 directives, which excluded converts, refused Brother Daniel's application. The case was heard in the Supreme Court, with five judges—instead of the usual three—sitting as a High Court of Justice. One can hardly think of a more bizarre case. The applicant, a Carmelite monk, invoked the *Halachic* rule which maintains that "a Jew, even if he sins, is a Jew." The respondent, the Minister of Interior, a member of the National Religious Party, argued that this rule notwithstanding, the applicant was not a Jew for the purpose of

registration and automatic citizenship. In other words, if religious law, the *Halacha*, applied, the applicant would have succeeded. The court decided by a majority of four to one that the term "Jew" has two distinct meanings: the one defined in accordance with religious law, the second depending upon popular recognition of a person as Jewish. The court regarded the Law of Return as a secular law and, therefore, accorded the loose popular meaning to its use of the term "Jew." It was the secular view, the view of the man in the street, which, in the eyes of the court, excluded the applicant. It was the secular view which treated conversion as decisive and excluded the convert from the Jewish community.⁶

The Minister of Interior and the religious parties won a pyrrhic victory. The result was in their favour, but the principle established was a double-edged sword. If the term Jew had two distinct meanings, could it not be utilised in order to enlarge the concept of a Jew in the popular sense to include those who are not Jews in the religious sense? In Brother Daniel's case, the court used the popular meaning in order to exclude those recognised by the *Halacha*. Why could it not be used to include those not recognised as Jews by the *Halacha*? Some religious writers expressed grave doubts whether their cause would not have been better served by granting Brother Daniel's request, thus avoiding a dangerous precedent. Indeed, it was the ruling in the Brother Daniel case which constituted the gravamen of Shalit's argument.

AS SOON AS SHALIT APPLIED to the court, the judges sensed that they were dealing with an explosive issue. By that time the court had already established its liberal tradition by annulling administrative measures and by-laws enacted out of religious motives. The Supreme Court has abrogated by-laws and regulations which sought to prohibit the raising of pigs and the sale of pork. It has forced local authorities to let their halls for Jewish Reformed services. Due to the court's intervention, petrol stations are permitted to open on the Sabbath—all local by-laws ordering their closure have been declared *ultra vires*. In a dramatic showdown, the court recently frustrated Mrs Golda Meir's intention to stop

television broadcasts on the Sabbath—a price demanded by the religious parties for their participation in a Coalition government. The highest court of the land has gone further and subordinated the Chief Rabbinate to its jurisdiction, even in cases involving matters of *Kashrut* (i.e. observance of dietary laws) and has forced the Minister of Trade and Industry to issue import permits for non-*kosher* food. Three of the Justices indicated on various occasions that they regarded the absence of civil marriage as an infringement of freedom of conscience. In short, the Court has antagonised and even infuriated the religious establishment. But Shalit's application went further than that and touched upon the central nervous system of the body politic.

SHALIT LODGED HIS APPLICATION in February 1968. After the first sitting it was decided to call a special five judges' court, but later the President, Justice Agranat, decided to take the hitherto unprecedented step and convene the whole court, nine judges in all, to hear the case. The hearing began on 17 October 1968, in a courtroom packed with journalists.

Shalit appeared in person and in uniform. Opposite him stood Meir Shamgar, the articulate and impressive Attorney-General. Both parties were armed mainly with non-legal authorities, invoking the writings of Jewish philosophers, statesmen, and scholars. It was the least legal case ever argued. The Attorney-General's case lay on the historical equation of nation and religion which was the essence of both Judaism and the Jewish existence. Shalit's case rested legally on the *Brother Daniel* ruling; but his main argument was based on a new concept of "Jewishness" evolved in the new Israeli experience. His contention was simple and appealed to many Israelis: the religious test could not be applicable to Israeli conditions. He cited the case of Kamal Nimri, a terrorist caught and tried in Israel, who was born to a Jewish mother and an Arab father. Shalit summed up his argument with a sentence which later became the war-cry of the secular front:

Would Kamal Nimri, the terrorist, be regarded as a Jew while my children, who get a Hebrew and Israeli education and who would fight for Israel, be considered as non-Jews?

The court adjourned and took time for consideration. In November 1968, it took an extraordinary step. All nine Justices appealed to the Government to relieve them of the

⁶ The applicant was, of course, allowed to settle in Israel and to acquire Israel citizenship. It was only his right to *automatic* citizenship which was in question. The minority judge, Justice Cohen, thought that any person who *bona fide* regards himself as Jewish should be so regarded for the purpose of the Law of Return.

burden of decision. The court suggested that the problem be solved by deleting *leom* from the registration papers. The judges were aware that this step would create certain difficulties, but it was their considered view that these were not insurmountable. The court's plea was brought to the cabinet and rejected in what was later described by one of the judges as "a summary procedure." The Minister of Justice, Mr Yaakov Shimshon Shapiro, spoke against the court's initiative and suggestion, and the unpleasant buck was passed back to the court. It was reported at the time that the Cabinet's rejection was based upon security grounds: the item *leom* is included in identity cards and is the only way of distinguishing between Arab, Druze, and Jew. The item religion does not appear in the identity card or in any other document carried by Israelis.

THE COURT, faced with the government's rejection of its proposal, was by now inclined to postpone the decision. The next general elections to the Knesset were due on 28 October 1969. Any decision, one way or the other, was bound to ignite a political powder keg and draw the reluctant court into the rough-and-tumble of party politics. However, the long delay gave the religious bloc time to close its ranks and consolidate its front. Emergency assemblies of rabbis railed against any possible deviation from the *Halacha*. One of the Chief Rabbis sent official letters to the judges warning them against the consequences of any such deviation—thus committing a contempt of court, later denounced by Justice Sussman in his decision. After the elections, the National Religious Party made it clear that if the court accepted a non-*Halachic* definition of a Jew, it would demand that it be reversed by legislation. It was quite explicit on this issue: the National Religious Party would not remain in any government which allowed this to happen. The court had sought to douse the powder keg; instead the spark continued to splutter.

THE EXPLOSION came on Friday 23 January 1970. By a majority of 5 to 4, the court accepted Shalit's application and ordered the religious Minister of Interior to register his children as Jews under their *leom*. Even before anyone had time to read the lengthy judgment—130 pages in all—the religious parties lashed out against the majority with a ferocity unparalleled in Israel's history of respect for the judiciary. Two religious ministers spoke out against the deci-

sion as soon as the news reached them. They were not going to surrender to it. Cables of protest from Orthodox Rabbis abroad began to come in and pile up on the Prime Minister's table.

The Rabbinate issued a proclamation stating that any enforcement of the Court's ruling would be contrary to the Holy Writ and ordered the Minister of Interior not to obey the Court's decision. The Minister of Interior, Mr Haim Shapiro, indicated that he would not comply with the decision—at least not immediately. His refusal added to the political tension mounting up throughout Israel. A loud and heated debate swept the whole country.

Actually, the Supreme Court's decision was of much less significance than that attributed to it. Of the five majority justices, only one, Justice Berinson, stated clearly that the Shalit children were Jewish in the secular sense evolved in the *Brother Daniel* case. Justice Cohen indicated that he would, if need be, reach the same conclusion. However, the majority opinions did not revolve round the "who's a Jew" dilemma, but on technical legal grounds relating to the interpretation of the Registration Law. All five Justices thought that the Registration Officer had no authority to pry into a *bona fide* declaration of the applicant. On the contrary, the court held that unless the declaration is palpably false, the Ministry is under an obligation to accept the applicant's statement. The object of the law was not to establish "objective" truth through fact-finding officers, but rather to collect statistical data for administrative purposes. For these purposes, a *bona fide* declaration was sufficient and the registration officer had neither the authority nor the means to go into the accuracy of the application. The minority opinions refused to accept this construction of the law and thought that the officer was not obliged to receive any declaration at its face value when it was clear (both to the officer as well as to the court) that the declaration was not true. But the minority judges were divided on the reasons for rejecting Shalit's application. Two religious judges, Silberg and Kister, refused to be swayed from what they regarded as the crucial point. The idea that there is a Jewish nation, which one could enter otherwise than through the gates of *Halacha*, clashed with what they saw as the very essence of the Jewish phenomenon. Two other judges, the President and Justice Landau, thought that the question of "who is a Jew" was an ideological issue which was not fit for judicial

determination. If, in the case of the Shalit children, *leom* remained blank this would not constitute an infringement of rights and the court could refrain from intervening in the matter without relinquishing its duty as protector of civil liberties.

In short, only three out of the nine judges actually delivered any opinion on the controversial question. But the religious parties were in no mood to be appeased or distracted by legal quibbling. Any breach of the *Halachic* wall was a catastrophe which had to be averted. Accusations were thrown against the Supreme Court Justices with growing ferocity. The Minister of Justice joined in with a criticism of the court's earlier suggestion to delete the item *leom*. Many in the secular sector thought that a showdown with the religious sector had to be avoided at all costs. Mrs Meir, prompted by the Minister of Justice, and eager to keep her national coalition government, decided on an attempt to reach a compromise solution. A week later, the two Shapiros—the Minister of Justice and the Minister of Interior—came out with a proposed package deal which comprised the following items:

1. The court's ruling would be carried out by the Minister of Interior.
2. The Knesset would change the law so as to exclude from the definition "Jew" anyone who is not recognised as such by *Halacha*.
3. The Law of Return would be extended to incorporate—both with regard to immigration and citizenship—spouses and children of Jews.

Later, and because of growing criticism inside their party, the Labour Ministers agreed on a further concession: conversion to Judaism will be recognised even if the ceremony is performed by non-orthodox rabbis outside Israel. The Law of Return was further extended to cover grandchildren of Jews.⁷ When the news of Labour's surrender broke out, attacks against the Government reached a new pitch. The high-handed fashion in which

⁷ The amended law recognises any conversion, as distinct from conversion in accordance with the *Halacha*—the phrase used in the 1960 directives. Whether the true interpretation of the law excludes non-Orthodox conversions performed, in Israel, remains to be seen. The religious parties have already served notice that any recognition of such conversions will be seen by them as a *casus belli*. Here, again, they demonstrate that preservation of the Orthodox monopoly inside Israel is of primary importance. From a purely religious point of view there is no distinction between conversions performed in Israel or outside it.

the Government acted was typical of the Israeli centralised political system. Disregarding the strong secular feeling, the Labour Ministers were ready not only to upset the court's ruling, but also to push the bill through the Knesset with unbecoming speed. Labour's swift action was motivated by its desire to put a quick end to an impending governmental crisis and to avoid the growing public storm. But inside Labour, a strong and vociferous minority spoke out against what it regarded as a shameful capitulation to "religious blackmail." On Tel Aviv walls anti-government and anti-religious slogans appeared. *Ha'aretz*, the Tel Aviv independent daily, and the *Jerusalem Post* came out strongly against the Government's initiative. Ben Gurion condemned the Bill and by way of protest refused to pay the customary respect to religious sensitivities by not wearing a hat at the televised funeral of a well-known Israeli author.

ONE COALITION PARTY—the leftist *Mapam*—said it would vote against the Government's bill and two other coalition parties—the Liberals and Independent Liberals decided to abstain. While the Knesset debated the bill, 4,000 outraged Israelis demonstrated outside and broke into the Knesset grounds. The following day, 4,000 religious Israelis staged a counter-demonstration. Inside the Knesset, the debate was punctuated by a number of incidents. Shalom Cohen, member of *Ha'olam Hazei* (a small radical party), tore up his identity card as a gesture of protest, while an outraged House answered him with an angry chorus of shouts. Uri Avneri, the other representative of *Ha'olam Hazei*, refused to obey the Speaker's order and was carried out by the Knesset guard. In the final stages of the Bill, Rabbi Porush, member of the ultra-orthodox Agudah Party, interrupted his speech, and in order to express his objection to non-orthodox conversions, produced a Reformed prayer book and threw it on the floor. The usually quiet and timid Knesset erupted into pandemonium.

Mrs Meir, by now absolutely convinced in her righteousness, refused to take off the party whip, even though there could not have been a stronger case for allowing members to vote according to their conscience. She insisted on imposing party discipline in order to obtain a clear majority. She thought that this would give the new law a moral authority—surely a strange piece of logic. There were also some rumours that the Prime Minister threatened to resign if the party did not stand behind her.

Speaking in favour of the bill, she made an emotional case for holding on to Jewish tradition and against mixed marriages. A few critics pointed out that these two issues were irrelevant: nobody had suggested forsaking the Jewish heritage and the law had no effect on mixed marriages. Such marriages are not prohibited under Israeli law⁸ and the new law, far from discouraging such marriages among Jews abroad, at least theoretically encourages them by inviting them to immigrate to Israel under the new amendment to the Law of Return. Even less satisfactory was the government's attempt to explain its refusal to delete the item *leom* altogether. The alleged security grounds were hardly mentioned in the debate—instead the government's spokesmen talked of the impact of the registration on Jewish awareness at home and on Jews in the Soviet Union, who would, according to this view, be greatly disturbed by such a deletion.⁹ Needless to say, the law was passed: 51 out of the 120 members voted for it; 14 against and 9 abstained.

BY NOW THE STORM has subsided and public attention is focused on the continuing war. But the issue is still alive: Israel is a secular society with a strong orthodox minority. There is some proof that a great many Israelis refuse

to accept the *Halachic* definition of who is a Jew. In an opinion poll taken in Israel in November 1968 for the *Jewish Chronicle*, 59% of the representative sample of Israelis questioned gave varying answers, such as "those who consider themselves to be Jews" and other replies clearly indicating non-religious criteria. Only 19% gave answers in accordance with *Halacha*. Public opinion may have swayed since then, but the strong secular feeling has certainly not disappeared.

WHEN ONE REVIEWS THE WHOLE affair, the impression is a mixed one. In the opinion of the present writer the new laws are objectionable as a matter of principle. Questions of identity, such as who is a Jew, cannot be defined by legislative measures. The Knesset, by adopting the government's bill, intervened in an ideological dispute and purported to force upon secular Israelis a concept which many reject.

It is absurd, [wrote Dr. Jack Cohen, a conservative Rabbi, in the *Jerusalem Post* (6 February 1970)], that a parliamentary body in a pluralistic, democratic state should decide the identity of a section of the population.

Such legislation is even more unpalatable when rushed through parliament under the threats of party whips and an impending political crisis.

On the other hand, from a practical point of view, the new laws can be considered as a step towards liberalisation. The religious parties got what they wanted on the insignificant issue of registration, but had to yield on the material issue of the Law of Return. This law now applies to many who are not regarded as Jews by religious laws.¹⁰ For the first time in Israel's history, the orthodox monopoly has been broken and non-orthodox conversions, at least abroad, are officially recognised. This recognition may accentuate the paradox. Miss Elizabeth Taylor, converted by a reformed Hollywood rabbi, would be recognised as Jewish while the Shalit children are rejected. But the precedent is of great importance. It is the first step towards introducing a pluralistic concept of Judaism into a country which is sharply divided between secular and orthodox camps. Already some religious leaders are beginning to realise that the government's solution may do them more harm than good.¹¹

At the beginning of June, the National Religious Party was about to leave the cabinet on the relatively unimportant issue—the Helen Seidman affair, Mrs Seidman, a new immigrant

⁸ There is no law in Israel which prohibits mixed marriage. Rabbinical jurisdiction applies only when both parties are Jewish. There are in Israel hundreds of mixed couples—usually an Arab husband and a Jewish wife—who were married and registered as married in Israel. Under Moslem law such marriages are valid and, consequently, such marriages are possible.

⁹ Under Soviet law, the Jews are registered as having a separate "peoplehood." It was argued that any deletion of the item "Jewish" from the Israeli identity cards would shock Soviet Jewry, whose registration as Jewish is one of the safeguards against total assimilation and oblivion.

¹⁰ Automatic citizenship, under the new amendment, is extended to any person, who has, or has had, one Jewish grandparent. Needless to say, this extension has not affected the rights to naturalisation. Under Israeli Citizenship Law, naturalisation is a relatively easy process: the requirements laid down by law—mainly, continuous residence of 3 out of 5 preceding years and some knowledge of Hebrew—are relatively lax.

¹¹ The Law does not make the new definition of a Jew obligatory for Israelis who refuse to be registered as having any *leom*. It only states that no person shall be registered as Jewish by *leom* unless born to a Jewish mother or converted. Thus Israelis do not have to declare themselves as belonging to any religion or *leom*. A similar situation exists in Yugoslavia. Article 41 of the Yugoslavia Constitution states that "no one shall have to declare himself as to nationality or determine himself for one of the nationalities."

from America and a member of a kibbutz, had been converted to Judaism by a reformed rabbi in Tel Aviv three years ago, before the ruling in the Shalit case. As a member of a secular kibbutz, she would have been disqualified by the Orthodox Rabbinate; she could not promise to observe the laws or eat *kosher* simply because there is no *kosher* food in her kibbutz. When the Interior Ministry refused to register her as Jewish, she went to court. Her case had to be decided in accordance with the Shalit ruling, as the new amendments did not have a retroactive effect. The Attorney General made it clear to the government that under the Shalit ruling, the petition was justified and that he could not defend the Interior Ministry's stand. A new outcry arose and the Chief Rabbinate issued another injunction ordering the Minister not to register Mrs Seidman as Jewish, even if ordered to do so by the courts. The hand of the Religious Ministers was thus forced and they threatened to leave the cabinet, unless the government yielded and initiated a law which would abrogate the court's expected decision.

This time Mrs Meir and her party refused to yield. One day before the court was due to deliver its judgment, the breaking up of the national coalition government seemed inevitable. But the Government and National Unity were saved, like the heroine in an old-fashioned farce, at the very last second, by a miraculous happy end.

A farce indeed it was. Poor Mrs Seidman, prompted by an unbeatable combination of Labour dignitaries and righteous Rabbis and warned of the grave responsibility placed upon her, was talked into undergoing a quick Orthodox conversion, to be performed by the Chief Army Rabbi and two other Army rabbis. The court's ruling was to be delivered on Monday, 15 June. On Sunday, Mrs Seidman was rushed through a supersonic ceremony purporting to be a conversion. On Monday, she was registered as Jewish by jubilant Ministry Officials. On the same day, she cancelled her application to the court, thus eliminating the immediate cause for governmental crisis. On Tuesday, however, the Supreme Rabbinical Court ruled that Mrs Seidman's conversion was not valid, because it had been conducted by an unauthorised tribunal; but before a new crisis arose, the conversion was validated by a lower Rabbinical Court.

The whole episode has lowered the reputation of established religion in Israel. Furthermore, the whole issue of reformed conversions remains unsolved and will probably plague the government in the not-too-distant future.¹²

PERHAPS THE GOVERNMENT'S GREATEST FAULT was that it closed its eyes to the new reality of Israel. The very existence of a secular Jewish state, where the great majority of Jews are in the process of establishing their national identity without relying primarily on religious links, is part of this new reality. The evolution of a new type of Israeli Jew, dependent more on common national and cultural ties than on common religious observance, cannot be disputed. No legislative measure is going to stop this process.

By ignoring these facts of Israeli life, Mrs Meir found herself in an absurd situation. She, like most Labour leaders, does not observe religious law. Mrs Meir admits that her kitchen is not *kosher*, and she breaks many rules which according to *Halacha* are grave offences. Moreover, as a woman she is disqualified by the *Halacha* from any public office. Yet, when it comes to the Shalit family, she refers them to a religious solution: conversion. Under Jewish law conversion must be undertaken willingly and without any ulterior motive. Under these rules, persons like Anne Shalit and other atheistic Israelis, would be disqualified from conversion. Moreover, by referring the Shalits to the religious formula, Mrs Meir demands of Anne Shalit and her children a standard of behaviour she and her colleagues fail to maintain. To religious Jews the case is simple and the definition of a Jew is clear and coherent. To secular Jews, the case is difficult and the religious solution of conversion unsatisfactory.

It has been said that the new amendments seek to diminish the cleavage between Israeli and Diaspora Jews. A national, as distinct from a universal-religious definition of a Jew, is open only to Israeli Jews. An Englishman, or an American, unless he is a Jew in the traditional sense, cannot be said to be a Jew by nationality or *leom*. In other words secularisation of the concept of Jewishness in Israel may weaken the links by which Diaspora and Israeli Jews are tied together. Yet this argument is hardly applicable to the strong secular elements in the Jewish communities of Western Europe, America, and the Soviet Union. The debate on Jewish identity, when couched in legal terms and

¹² The Seidman episode was ridiculed in the press and prompted Ephraim Kishon to comment: "Now we know why God loves us. We make him laugh. . . ."

translated into legislation, embarrasses Jews who were brought up on liberal traditions and the idea of separation of State and Religion. As Professor J. L. Talmon has already pointed out in *ENCOUNTER*, by such measures the religious bloc in Israel may be achieving the very opposite of what they are so anxious to secure: "Instead of erecting a dam to the forces of assimilation, they may be estranging and discouraging those whom they wish to save. . . ."

The Government was not asked to solve the problem of Jewish identity. The Court, in its suggestion to strike off *leom*, as well as the majority judgment, sought to refrain from deciding the issue. It has shown greater wisdom and better judgment than the Government.

THE ISRAELI EXPERIENCE is governed by two contradictory forces—tradition and renewal. True, Israel's roots go down into Jewish history, but out of these roots a new tree has grown. It is not always easy to distinguish where the roots end and the trunk begins, but one can tell the trunk from the roots. The type of Jewishness emerging in Israel is similarly distinguishable from the Jewish heritage which nourishes it. Future historians may regard the Shalit affair, and its subsequent tumult and shouting, merely as another in the series of growing pains of this unique tree.

LETTERS

Fletcher's Tories

RAYMOND FLETCHER ["Where Do We Go From Here?" *ENCOUNTER*, December] has chosen to speak with authority about the 1945-51 history of the Conservative Party. I'm afraid he is wrong in fact and interpretation. Let me first declare my "interest." I have been engaged in research in this period for a dissertation. Thanks to the late Iain Macleod, Sir Michael Fraser and Lord Butler, I have been given access to a great deal of information (not at all pre-selected) about these years.

Mr Fletcher writes that the "bright young men who served their apprenticeships in Central Office under the guidance of Lord Butler were mainly training themselves for office (which they eventually got.)" Mr Fletcher is confusing matters, and not merely technically. The "bright young men" under Lord Butler served under him as chairman of the Conservative Research Department. And

that is not a distinction without a difference. Others ran the Central Office at the time (Ralph Assheton, Lord Woolton), but the Research Department, Neville Chamberlain's creation in 1929, was a private preserve.

As for the "bright young men", they couldn't have been very bright if they entered the Research Department or Central Office after 1945 in the hope of achieving public office. After the thunderous repudiation of the Conservative Party in the 1945 elections, who but a deluded optimist could have believed in their early return to power? There were virtually no safe seats then and no one could say if there ever again would be safe Tory seats except perhaps for Waldron Smithers'.

I don't think there's anything wrong in entering politics to obtain office. (As Dr Johnson once said, "Politics are now nothing more than a means of rising in the world.") However, a young man who joined the Labour Party in mid-summer 1945 might more easily be described as training *himself* for office than Iain Macleod, Enoch Powell, Reginald Maudling when they decided to work for R. A. Butler in the Research Department. And there were other young men (Fraser, David Clarke) uninterested in public office, who entered the Department because they wanted to see a restoration of Tory principles. Isn't it possible that someone like Macleod, who later risked his political career by defying powerful Tories on the colonial question, might have joined the Party because he disagreed on principle with Labour's socialist philosophy? Had he wanted to rise above principle, the Labour Party would have been the intelligent place to go.

Mr Fletcher says that "all those Charters and Manifestos that were unread by anyone, except political correspondents short of a story or Transport House researchers after political ammunition, were products of a fringe activity." We will put down to hyperbole that the "Charters and Manifestos were unread by anyone." They did have a wide audience as a bit of investigation would easily prove. That, however, isn't important. What is important to disprove is Fletcher's statement that "the Conservative Party did not *debate* itself into an acceptance of the Welfare State between 1945 and 1951." On the contrary, it did "debate itself" but not only at party conferences. It was, like any serious party political debate, behind-the-scenes, at private Conservative committee hearings held all over Britain. In actual fact, the hearings were intended to prepare the party's supporters for what was coming, viz. the "Industrial Charter." Under men like Butler, Macmillan, Heathcoat Amory, and Research Department staff like Fraser and Clarke, an enormous amount of work was accomplished, not least of which was persuading—with surprisingly little difficulty—Winston Churchill that a new day was at hand.

Mr Fletcher says that the "Tories did not embrace the Welfare State and then proceed to reform it. They were stuck with it and behaved accordingly." Quite so for some Tories but there were others who were prepared to go far in changing the party, e.g. Butler, Macmillan and,

later, Macleod, Maudling, Heath. The most striking fault of the Labour Party, regardless of wing, is its inability to understand the Conservative Party, and particularly why it keeps winning elections in the most unpredictable fashion.

If I may extend Mr Fletcher's simile about the impossibility of Santa's aeronautical feats, I would tell the story about the bumblebee. Someone gave the insect's physical measurements to an aeronautical engineer without telling him what they represented. He studied the figures for quite a while and finally said whatever that was, it couldn't fly. So with Tories. By all the form-

charts they shouldn't win but they do. Mr Fletcher says that the Tories "certainly adapted themselves very well to the 1950s." The Tories can adapt and remain Tories, to themselves and everybody else. One reason for Torydom's improbable victories is Mr Fletcher's assumption that the only thing Tories can do is to adapt themselves to Labour realities. If Labour should ever begin to adapt itself to Tory realities, heaven help the Tories.

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Reading the Black Panthers

A Dissent—By COLIN MACINNES

THE EDITOR of ENCOUNTER has printed in its pages [ENCOUNTER, January] an account of his dismay at Black Panther propaganda which he read on a recent visit to the U.S. His conclusion is that its tone is one of violent nihilism, and his implication that for a black to support the Panthers is to advocate racist destruction, and for white to do so, to wish ill to the U.S. and to his own people.

Before criticising Melvin Lasky's interpretation, one must begin by admitting two factors that disturb him. The Black Panther movement is violent in the sense of largely rejecting those forms of legislative and legal process by which a social order may be altered. It does not reject these altogether, since Panthers have stood for legislative office (if only as a gesture), and have certainly made use of courts to defend themselves, often employing white attorneys. But they do bear arms—not, in itself, illegal under certain conditions in the U.S.—and use them both to threaten and when shot at; while the tone of many of their declarations assumes that a state of armed conflict already exists, between blacks and white authority, in the U.S. As for white support of the Black Panthers, except for those directly involved in their legal confrontations, or sometimes as allies—often tacit rather than overt—in their activities, this white behaviour can be masochistic and self-indulgent: comparable to the pursuit, by socialite kicksters seeking a *frisson*, of communist militants in the 1930s.

This allowed, one must first rebuke Melvin Lasky for getting his information exclusively from the militant Panther press. It is perhaps the current difficulty of obtaining details about communist intentions, especially in the case of China, in any way other than from their press, that leads political commentators to rely on propaganda sheets excessively. Yet all experienced journalists must know that the rhetoric of propaganda, and the reality of doctrine and

intention, do not always coincide. If only the propaganda is available, then this must be analysed, for want of anything more revealing. But in the case of black militants, it is by no means impossible, despite all hostility and suspicion, for a writer, even white, to seek them out and ask them what they mean. The Panther who sold Mr Lasky his newspaper on the sidewalk may not have been one of the party's ideologists; yet Mr Lasky, as is the journalist's first duty, should have engaged him in some conversation. If he did, he does not tell us so; nor does he tell us that he complemented his study of the propaganda by any attempt to contact, and listen to, the men who wrote it.

TO SEEK OUT THE ORIGINATORS of their ideas is especially necessary in the case of revolutionary parties. A man like Lenin (or, for that matter, in his odd way, Hitler) who, apart from extreme (and legitimate) secrecy as to tactical intentions, printed exactly what he thought, is extremely rare: both because few political activists are as coherent as Lenin, and because the written word is often used by militants to bludgeon thought, rather than illuminate it. Yet even if Mr Lasky intended to confine his deductions to those available from prints, he should surely have preferred the statements of Newton, Seale, or Cleaver, all available, to those of a sheet bought on the curbside.

It is a limitation of American and British journalists—and indeed, of their politicians—that few have had, personally and directly, the experience not just of living in, but belonging to, a society in violent turmoil. He who has reported the Viet Nam war, or racial riots in the U.S., might rejoin indignantly that he knows these from first hand, and that many of his comrades have been killed in such reporting. But apart from the fact that few political commentators have had even this experience, to visit a war

or riot on assignment is not at all the same experience as being totally involved in them. Certainly, intelligence and imagination, plus direct observation, can yield a better understanding of militant attitudes in a violent social context; yet only to live inside this context could be to understand it fully, whatever conclusions as to action may be drawn; and those who, not living it, and not feeling the same imperative to any action, still wish to write about a violent social situation, should constantly remember this.

IT IS THIS THAT EXPLAINS the weakness, even the irrelevance, of Mr Lasky's denunciation of the Panthers. The tone is that of those historians who, from their studious peace, evoke past battles: "the error of Napoleon was not to have moved his troops. . . ." and so forth—one has only to read such lines to know the "historian" has no conception of what "moving troops" in battle involves. It also explains why continental European politicians, and most of those in the Asian worlds, as opposed to those of England and America, speak so much more realistically (whatever may be the accuracy of their ensuing judgments) of the modern world: for so many of them know prisons and revolutions by the dire experience of their own skins. Thus, if M Chaban-Delmas or Mr Heath were each to consider black militancy, M Delmas' interpretation would hold the additional dimension of his having carried a gun in the French resistance; for the military experience in a conventional army of Mr Heath is not a political one, or scarcely so.

It is, indeed, in terms of a resistance movement that one must think of the Black Panthers if one wishes, even from the outside, to understand their speech and action. Their critics may tell them there is not a war of occupation in the U.S., the police are not the Gestapo, no concentration camps are in preparation; but the Panthers believe there is and are these things. How far they are right or wrong in thinking this, only a black or white American extremely close to ghetto existence, in terms of his body being exposed to it every day, can know; and he who is not can never judge fully of what Panthers say and do, or write about these things, without admitting he is only guessing what they think, and why.

A Reply

THIS IS A GENERAL subject about which our friend and valued contributor, Colin MacInnes, knows a good deal more than I do. I refer the reader (and myself) to the dozen or so articles on Black themes which he has published in the pages of *ENCOUNTER*. How I wish that this time, too, his arguments could convince me (if only for my long-standing wish to see at last a confession of conversion in a letters-to-the-editor column, instead of the ceaseless spectacle of one powerful polemical intervention only eliciting another). But Mr MacInnes is, alas, unconvincing.

1. I didn't "denounce" the Black Panthers, and wrote more in sorrow than in anger at the sight of so much desperate crusading energy being harnessed to such primitive political instincts of murder and suicide.

2. I have indeed listened to many black militant spokesmen. But the point of my very short piece was not to transcribe yet again their well-known conversational turns but to record what they, in some apparently unguarded moments, officially publish in their own official newspaper—and to contrast these authentic outbursts with the superficial impression which a great many British writers have taken away from a reading of the more carefully prepared statements in Black Power books (white-published, and often white-edited, for a white audience).

3. All truth is hard to come by, and I do not mind being "rebuked" for not quite managing to catch all of it. Still it is ironic to be faulted for "getting one's information exclusively from the militant Panther press", rather than, say, from the anti-militant anti-Panther media. Mr MacInnes suggests that it is misleading "to rely on propaganda sheets" and that one must try and go behind the propagandists, "to seek them out and ask what they mean." He goes on to recommend as preferable "the statements of Newton, Seale, or Cleaver," rather than "those of a sheet bought on the curbside." I disagree. Surely the leading ideologists give forth only more propaganda, and on a distinctly less revealing level. Black Panther leaders seem to spend most of their time talking to and writing for sympathetic white audiences. What would be more calculated than for Eldridge Cleaver to explain (as in *Soul on Ice*) that his crimes as a convicted rapist were really civic acts, for rape could be a form of love? And what could be more dialectical than for Bobby Seale to argue (as in *Seize the Time*) that the killings advocated by Black Panther slogans like "Off the Pig!" didn't really mean "commit murder"? No, I suspect that the deeper meanings are not to be found in the formal ideological presentations but in their own literature and internal bulletins. That was why I found those texts I quoted from *The Black Panther* so illuminating.

4. I referred to the extraordinary elements of fantasy and even paranoia which enter more and more into the Black Panther ideology. Mr MacInnes only underlines this when he tries to defend the militants' belief in things that are simply not so (*Gestapo*, concentration camps, war of occupation, etc.). As American Negro leaders like Roy Wilkins (of the NAACP) and Bayard Rustin (of the A. Philip Randolph Institute) have pointed out, the black extremist leaders live in a theatrical world of their own making and are quite divorced from the real struggle of the Negro people for more and better jobs, decent housing, improved education, and expanded political rights. They have, as Marx and Lenin would have insisted, neither a social base nor a social theory. Armed with few supporters and even fewer ideas,

they have set themselves up as a dramatic band of desperadoes, grimly acting out an improvised revolutionary scenario. Does one misunderstand them when one thinks that they may well try and do what they say they want to do? No doubt they would have been better understood by Nechayev in Moscow, or Otto Strasser in Munich, or D'Annunzio in Fiume, or indeed Fidel and Che in the Sierra Maestra. But it seems to me that in the America of today, plagued by a crisis of real racial injustice, one thing has become increasingly clear—there is (to adapt the great aphorism of Joe Louis) nothing wrong there that the Black Panthers will ever be able to set right.

5. I should add that such fringe phenomena of the political extreme, whether Old or New, Black or White, are best understood by the main body of an historic social movement on which such splinter groups are inevitable (and even understandable) excrescences, always painful, often ugly and poisonous. When we consider the actual history of the reforms which have improved man's lot, given him fairer shares and greater personal rights, it is not the desperadoes who have persisted over generations, educating and organising and legislating, until real meliorative turning-points have been reached. They are the heroes only in their own short-lived melodramas. Except for a few tragic circumstances when such small bands of "barbarians of virtue"—full of love for Man in general, and of hate for the mankind around them—managed to come to power, revolutionary noises are their specialty and only achievement. This was put with bitter eloquence the other day by Saul Alinsky, the grand old man of U.S. radical militance, the organiser of the "poor and downtrodden" in the slums of many American cities. I quote from an interview with him in Chicago, as published in the *International Herald Tribune* (8 January, p. 14):

"There can be no immaculate conception of organisation, there isn't any short-cut. You call a national conference and people show up who don't represent anybody, and they make militant with the mouth."

When he talks to students, he strives to get them moving. "I say to these kids, 'Stop looking for somebody with charisma. Get busy and start organising. Make it a full-time job'. . . . These kids are not going for a revolution, they're going for a revelation. The one thing you have to be able to do is communicate, but they refuse to use the skills of their own middle-class background. It's a wonder they don't insist on re-inventing the wheel because it came out of a bourgeois, decadent society. . . ."

"I've run into more senility among the 19-to-20-year-olds than among the aged," insisted Mr Alinsky, who is 61. "Life is too much for them, so they jump off into a mystical future. They have a penchant for picking losers."

"Che Guevara—what the hell did he do except get himself shot—Mao's Red Book, in this cybernetic, automated, technological, jet-propelled modern civilisation, is about as germane as running a stage-coach to Kennedy Airport."

He is just as critical of the Black Panthers. "When the Panthers began I found myself quite sympathetic. But what's wrong or right about them is academic now. The moment Huey Newton glorified the shooting in Marin County courthouse they blew it. . . . I think the Panthers are asking for it. A guy has to be a political idiot to say all power comes out of the barrel of a gun when the other side has the guns. . . . A lot of their rhetoric becomes a bore. You start saying 'white fascist racist pig' and people turn off. Here's Newton saying he can't get justice in an American court, and all the time he's saying that he's out on reversal by a superior court. The Panthers will still get a bubble of publicity, but their days are numbered. . . ."

6. Meanwhile, *The Black Panther* continues publication, and reading the latest number to reach here (14 Dec. 1970), I find an official statement from the Minister of Information of the Black Panther Party, namely Eldridge Cleaver, pronouncing from Algerian exile. He expresses pride in his downtrodden supporters, the so-called *Lumpen* (for so long a term of Marxian contempt), and he goes on to state: ". . . we look upon these as the lumpen-proletariat. And this is where the Black Panther Party has its social base." He re-affirms his support for any and all extreme methods (in earlier days he had differences with Bobby Seale over whether a revolutionary should be happy or sad to have to "pull triggers"), and he puts it plainly: "we make no bones about the fact that we will stop at nothing including armed violence." Finally, Cleaver vows war to the death against the enemy oppressors, and concludes on that recurring *Kamikaze* theme: "So in order to deal with these people we will move in a collective fashion, but if that does not work we have no hang-ups about revolutionary suicide."

What a waste—and oh, the pity of it all!

M.J.L.

Scare-Mongering?

JOHN MADDOX, in his comments on my book [ENCOUNTER, January] is either being misleading himself or does not understand the demographic position when he points out that the birth-rate is falling in the U.S.A. and infers that this justifies optimism about the population explosion. The question, in all such cases, is: is the birth-rate falling *faster* than the death-rate? The answer is "No." Hence populations are rising and, in many areas, catastrophically. Even if the U.S. population were stable the effect on the world picture would be insignificant.

I suggest he should read the December issue of the FAO's review *CERES*, which, in addition to an article entitled: "Africa: the Danger of Under-estimating the Population Explosion" and another predicting (as I also did) serious political trouble in South America as a result of the growth of shanty-towns, also contains some striking new figures on the food supply. World agricultural output per head was 2% *down*, and fisheries 4% *down*, in 1969 as against 1968. In Latin America,

over the last 20 years, meat supplies per head have fallen from 37.7 kg. to 32.8 kg.; they are also down in Africa. In absolute terms they have risen, but the population has risen even faster.

Recently the Director-General of the FAO, A. H. Boerma, declared that "the menaces of the next 25 years are, in almost all ways, more frightening than those we faced" [in the past 25 years.] Does John Maddox believe the FAO engages in "scare-mongering"?

GORDON RATTRAY TAYLOR

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France*

"The Abuse of Psychiatry"

*The fear, of Henry Miller—professor,
Of a psycho-analytic confessor
Is unfounded indeed,
For all that we need,
Is observe Henry Miller—aggressor.*

B. M. H. HARDMAN

*Leighland,
Roadwater,
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The Black Panther, Again

IT WAS AN AMUSING footnote to cold war history to see that M.J.L. ["A Reading of The Black Panther", ENCOUNTER, January] still retains those two separate blockages, a paranoia about Marxism, and an inability to be fair to the *Guardian*. In his note on the Black Panthers, he quotes from approving reviews of Bobby Seale's *Seize the Time* in the *New Statesman*, the *Economist*, and the *Observer* and then turns to my review with the comment "The *Guardian* as always was not far behind, trying to keep pace with all the other lively minds". It was a nice shot, but actually my review appeared on 15th October, the *Economist's* appeared on 17th October, the *New Statesman* the following week (23rd October), and the *Observer* a week after that (1st November).

M.J.L. then quoted the incomplete sentence from my review "... they (the Panthers) have inevitably called forth that heavy-handed mixture of panic and overkill which the American Establishment reserves for anything that sounds vaguely Socialist". But why censor my main point by leaving out the beginning of the sentence which reads "By adopting a rhetoric full of Marxist echoes they have inevitably etc . . ." Have the words Marxist and Marxism now become such bogeys for M.J.L. that he does not even dare to mention them?

JONATHAN STEELE

*The Guardian,
London*

1. I AM SORRY that I seemed to be jumbling the chronology of those historic ten or twelve days. When I suggested that the *Guardian's* reviewer was "not far behind," I didn't mean it chronologically but intellectually. Still it is good to have the dates

set right and to know that the *Guardian's* lively mind led all the rest in foolishness.

2. The full sentence makes no more sense than the phrases I quoted. I was not "censoring" at all, only sparing the reader an extra portion of misinformation. For it is simply not the case that the American Establishment panics to the point of overkill at anything "vaguely socialist." Where has Mr Steele been since the hey-day of Eugene Victor Debs and Norman Thomas? Nor is it true that "a rhetoric full of Marxist echoes" is what has proved disturbing about the Black Panthers. The American Communist Left, including its Negro organisers and theoreticians, is "full of Marxist echoes", with Leninist echoes thrown in into the bargain, and nobody—not even that ultra-sensitive ideologist in charge of the F.B.I., Mr J. Edgar Hoover—has been seen to "panic." What is special about the Black Panther "rhetoric" (and in many American courts it is now being tested whether it involves only words, and not also deeds) is its advocacy of violence and its pre-occupation with terrorism, murder, assassination, and the martyrdom of suicide in battle.

3. I cannot quite fathom what such differences over the Black Panthers have to do with "cold war history" or with "an inability to be fair to the *Guardian*." The *Guardian* is a newspaper of many and varied opinions, and one sometimes agrees, sometimes disagrees. I was very much struck by its powerful leading article (presumably not written by Mr Steele) on the recent bomb explosions in the house of Minister Carr; and it made the point:

"... the disease of violence has (not) yet taken root in Britain. It may come if the danger is not seen. Sometimes too readily the philosophy of 'burn, baby, burn' is looked on with sympathetic tolerance. In the context of British life it is pernicious. . . . It is a reminder, however, that Weathermen, Minutemen, Klansmen, and Black Panthers are unnecessary and unwanted here."

(*Guardian*, 14 Jan., p. 10).

One would have thought that "the disease of violence" (what the *Guardian* daringly calls "the Guevarist or Marcusean infection") would have been as "unwanted" in the U.S.A. as over here. Still, it seems to suggest that Mr Steele, loyal *Guardian* man that he is, would be better occupied writing protest letters to his own Editor.

4. With his last cruel sentence Mr Steele finally scores. I am afraid that my own personal panic at the very mention of such bogeys as "Marxist and Marxism" is well known. I tear up, in paranoic fits, every ENCOUNTER manuscript that even touches on the subject, and I have recently been seen by my neighbours to be burning copies of my old Riazanov edition of the *Gesamtausgabe* in the back streets of Highgate Village, not far from a certain unmentionable German's tomb in the local cemetery.

M.J.L.

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